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The American University in Cairo
School of Humanities and Social Sciences

“Dhakirat al-alam:”
Palestinian Traumatic Memory in Three Works by Elias Khoury

A Thesis Submitted to The
Department of Arab and Islamic Civilizations

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts

By
Nourhan Tewfik

Under the Supervision of Professor Samia Mehrez
May 2019

To my mother,

For valuing my rushed dreams,

And nurturing them with her generous love.

To my father,

For gifting me my first book,

And inspiring me with his ceaseless sense of wonder.

To Samia Mehrez,

For teaching, telling and reading literature with such grace,

And triggering my love for the written word in the process.

To Sherene Seikaly,

For introducing me to Palestine, its ongoing experiences of Nakbah and Şumūd,

And for her relentless bias towards the human experience.

“Forget that it’s set in Palestine because it is a story about the human dream and how people can survive catastrophe.”

-Elias Khoury

Abstract

This thesis project traces the development of a Palestinian counter-narrative of trauma in the literary works of Lebanese novelist, editor and critic Elias Khoury. It does so by looking at three novels by Khoury: the first work is *Mamlakat al-ghurabā'* (*The Kingdom of Strangers*, 1993), which introduces his project on narrating the Palestinian experience and meditates on the potential structure of a Palestinian trauma narrative. Probably his most read work, the second novel, *Bāb al-shams* (*Gate of the Sun*, 1998), builds on these beginnings by re-enacting an incomplete, fragmented and non-teleological narrative of Palestinian traumatic memory. The same preoccupation with the history of Palestinian trauma figures in Khoury's *āwlād al-ghitu, ismī Adam* (*Children of the Ghetto, My Name Is Adam*, 2016) which raises the question of identity in relation to trauma and digs deep into how traumatic events interrupt and reshape one's self. Equally important is how all three works bring together Palestinian and Jewish traumatic histories analogously to disrupt Israeli hegemonic meta-narratives and propose both traumatic experiences as mirrors for other histories of suffering.

Introduction

I was nine years old when the Second *intifāḍah* broke out. I remember getting into my mother's car after school and asking her what my teachers meant by the word *intifāḍah* and why a so-called *intifāḍah* was happening in Palestine. To this day I still remember my mother's candid answer: the steadfast Palestinian people were once again rising against an occupying army called Israel.

Beyond home as the space where *intifāḍah* news reached me in soundbites, school was where my preoccupation with this powerful moment took on more creative forms. Knowing of my growing affinity towards the written word, my third grade Arabic teacher, a Palestinian by the name of Ms. Fatina, asked me to memorize a famous Jerusalem-themed poem penned by Al-Rahbani brothers and sung by Lebanese legend Fayrouz. The following day, I was standing before my school peers at morning lines and reciting the introductory lines of this poem. My young mind made a correlation between the *intifāḍah* as an inspiring act of resistance and poetry as an associated form of artistic expression, such that I grew up identifying with both as deeply intimate practices.

Flash forward to 2011 and the eruption of Egypt's January 25 revolution. As Cairo's Tahrir Square filled with thousands of buoyant protestors, I was immediately brought back to the moment captured in the opening of this introduction. In my mind there was a certain continuity between this earlier moment of Palestinian steadfastness and Egypt's glorious revolution. One possible trigger behind this association, I think, was how Palestinians of the

West Bank and Gaza cheered on Egypt's protestors the same way Egyptians had celebrated the steadfastness of their Palestinian comrades just a decade earlier.

As the "Arab Spring" followed suit, Syrians soon took their demands for bread, freedom, and social justice to the streets. While the specifics of this revolution-turned-war are beyond the focus of this thesis, I would like to take a quick intermission to discuss a philological similarity that directly inspires this project. With the quick transformation of Syria's revolution into a now-seven-year-old war, Arab intellectuals described Syria's disintegrating revolution as a new *Nakbah*, their coinage for the most part appearing in the digital space. Syria was no doubt gripped by a man-made catastrophe. But what was truly startling about this coinage was how a marker of the Palestinian tragedy, the word *Nakbah*, was now being appropriated to label the Syrian catastrophe.

If Egypt's uprising signaled a certain continuity between Palestinian and Egyptian forms of activism, the loss of Syria, its very *Nakbah*, interrupted this imagined sense of closeness. Prior to the Syrian revolution, the triad of Lebanon, Jordan and Syria was the closest one could get, or be, to Palestine. With the loss of Syria, I was further than I had ever been to the land of olives and vines. The Syrian catastrophe constituted a profoundly personal loss.

As the catastrophes multiplied over the following years and more *nakbahs* ensued in Libya, Yemen and Bahrain, I was intrigued to learn what it meant to lose one's home, be forsaken by history and suffer an unimaginable loss. I needed to understand what it meant to become a refugee and get on death boats to die before you make it or make it in time for your death. Finally, I sought to understand what it meant for catastrophes to pile up on top of each

other, such that three consecutive generations of Palestinians have had to experience *Nakbah* as a daily reality since 1948.

In fact, Elias Khoury, whose very writing informs this thesis project, says something similar in the following excerpt from his 2018 interview with *The National*:

In the past 10 years, we have seen great hope, great disappointment, great ambition, and great catastrophes.¹

These clashing moods, Khoury adds, introduced two challenges: “how to give that pain a voice and how to listen to the silence of the victims.”²

Taking as its main focus the *Nakbah* (traumatic event) and the *mankūb* (traumatized subject) and guided by Khoury’s description of Palestinian traumatic memory as “*Dhakirat al-alam*,” this thesis project asks what it means to be shattered by an unfathomable pain and wonders how best to narrate the wound that emanates from traumatic experiences.³

In her book *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, trauma theorist Cathy Caruth links trauma to literature and emphasizes how the literary text can feature the phases of “speak[ing] about and speak[ing] through the profound story of traumatic experience.”⁴ Following Caruth’s words, it can be argued that Khoury is a writer who, especially in the course of his writing on Palestine, has ‘spoken about’ and ‘spoken through’

¹ Rupert Hawksley, “Lebanese Author Elias Khoury: ‘I Feel That We Are Beyond Despair,’” *The National*, October 5, 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/arts-culture/books/lebanese-author-elias-khoury-i-feel-that-we-are-beyond-despair-1.777514>.

² Ibid.

³ Elias Khoury, “Dhakirat al-hayyat,” Facebook, December 10, 2018. https://m.facebook.com/story.php?story_fbid=2056126027809839&id=100002373850048&ref=content_filter.

⁴ Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 4.

the traumatic experience of the 1948 *Nakbah*, and more importantly, of its incessant presence to this day.

While literary writings on the Palestinian experience of dispossession and its traumatic undertones have been a constant feature of Arabic literary production over the past seven decades, there is enough reason to argue for the inimitability of Khoury's literary project. For one, Khoury is a non-Palestinian writing about Palestine. His avid identification with Palestine and the multifaceted nature of his enterprise, especially in his capacity as staunch political activist and former freedom fighter, have allowed him to grasp the nuances of collective Palestinian trauma and to communicate it in writing. Khoury spent as much time and effort fighting for the Palestinian cause as he did inscribing the Palestinian tragedy. When he was no longer fighting alongside his Palestinian comrades during the Lebanese Civil War, Khoury was in his Beirut office editing The Institute for Palestine Studies' *Majalat al-dirāsāt al-filasṭīniyah* (*Journal of Palestine Studies*) which he still manages to this day. These different aspects of the writer's life feed into each other and give his writing on Palestine a distinctive uniqueness.

Following this short introduction of my project, my main question then becomes: how does Elias Khoury narrate the Palestinian traumatic experience that begins with the 1948 *Nakbah* and lingers till this day? Before outlining how I intend to answer this question, a quick intermission to chart the Palestinian *Nakbah* is due.

The 1948 *Nakbah* and Institutionalizing the Zionist Project

The *Nakbah*, translated as 'catastrophe', is a central signifier of the post-1948 Palestinian experience. It was coined by Syrian intellectual Constantine Zurayk in his book

Ma'na al-Nakbah (*The Meaning of Catastrophe*, 1948) in which he identified the *Nakbah* as a true “Arab predicament” that had to be confronted at once. To circumvent this quandary, Arabs were to “play a role in minimizing the long-term repercussions of the defeat by addressing the factors comprising [this] Arab predicament.”⁵ By using the word “predicament” to describe the post-1948 reality, Zurayk was alluding to a new political reality in Palestine whereby a settler-colonial entity, namely the Zionist entity, arose as a dominant political force that displaced hundreds of thousands of Palestinians and brutally disrupted the conditions of Palestinian existence. Beyond the catastrophe’s political implications as outlined by Zurayk, the *Nakbah* also signaled the opening of a collective traumatic memory marred by a triad of loss, displacement and dispossession.

This *Nakbah* was a flip side for a celebratory moment, manifested by the long-awaited independence for World Jewry. A basic Israeli causality lay at the heart of this newly acquired independence. It rested on two main tenets: first, there was the David vs. Goliath myth, a “central fallacy” which held that the 1948 war “was waged between a relatively defenseless and weak (Jewish) David and a relatively strong (Arab) Goliath.”⁶ According to this narrative, the annihilation of an Arab Goliath was a prerequisite for Jewish survival. Secondly, there was the narrative of Holocaust victimization: a grave moral contradiction which held that the end of Jewish traumatic history, i.e. the Holocaust, was only possible through the continued victimization of Palestinians. This myth would be challenged by the New Historians in the 1980s, among them Idith Zertal, who, according to a 1996 *HaAretz* report, was adamant to

⁵ Adel Manna', “The Palestinian Nakba and its Continuous Repercussions,” *Israel Studies* 18, no. 2, (2013), 88.

⁶ Benny Morris, “The New Historiography: Israel Confronts its Past,” In *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 16.

reveal “how the Holocaust, and particularly the Holocaust survivors . . . were regarded as assets for purposes of its establishment.”⁷

Israeli Independence thus necessitated the displacement of Palestine’s own catastrophe: one traumatic narrative had to be quieted for another one to survive. Khoury captures the nuances of this displacement in the following excerpt of an interview with *Malta Today*:

This is the first case in history where the victims have no right to express themselves because their victimization is covered by another victimization and the colonial forces were cynical enough to wash their hands from Palestinian blood. The terrible thing is that in the daily life they not only not speak about their victimization to others but they do not speak about it to themselves because the fabrication of reality has turned their cause into nonsense.⁸

Early Zionist historiography partook in this silencing of Palestinian victimization by creating a “colonial archive” which “reorder[ed]” the past to validate a desired present.⁹ Beyond creating an archive that forged Zionist links to the historic land, the Zionist entity also extended its control over the Palestinian archive, denying Palestinians access to their own history and allowing for an effacement of Palestinian traumatic memory. This silencing of the Palestinian traumatic experience also found its way to Israeli literature, manifest in how the latter undermined the possibility of encountering the other, i.e. the Palestinian, within the literary text. Perhaps the most powerful attestation to Israel’s brutal displacement of Palestinian trauma is how the former continues to prohibit the commemoration of the *Nakbah* to this day. As Khoury puts it:

⁷ Yechiam Weitz, “Dialectical versus Unequivocal: Israeli Historiography’s Treatment of the Yishuv and Zionist Movement Attitudes toward the Holocaust,” In *Making Israel*, ed. Benny Morris (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007), 288.

⁸ Jurgen Balzan, “Truth is Always Revolutionary,” *Malta Today*, August 30, 2016, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/interview/69023/truth_is_always_revolutionary_elias_khoury#.XKtnwS2B00p.

⁹ Ann Laura Stoler. “On Archiving as Dissensus,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 38 (2018): 50.

Israel presents itself as a country based upon the memories of the Holocaust, the memory of the suffering of the Jewish people, but they do not recognize the need of others to their own memories. This is reflected not only in politics or literature, it's reflected in all levels of life.¹⁰

This failure to recognize Palestinian suffering as a byproduct of the Zionist enterprise is at the heart of Edward Said's 1992 seminal book *The Question of Palestine*. In the introduction to this book, Said echoes the aforementioned silencing of Palestinian traumatic memory by arguing that:

Israel . . . as well as its supporters, has tried to efface the Palestinian in words and actions because the Jewish state in many (but not all) ways is built on negation of Palestine and the Palestinians.¹¹

On the one hand, the Zionist project was a "colonial vision" which looked down upon Palestinian Arabs, the original inhabitants of historic Palestine.¹² It thought of itself as a "redemptive mission" and "assume[d] responsibility for expressing what the Arabs were really like and about, never to let the Arabs appear equally with them as existing in Palestine."¹³ On the other hand, the Zionist project put special emphasis on applauding "Israel and its history" both of which, Said argues, "have been celebrated without interruption."¹⁴

This imbalance of power *and* representation between Israel and Palestine has resulted in an impasse that lingers to this day, what Said describes as "each side's failure in a sense to

¹⁰ Amelia Smith, "We are not Made of Ink," *Middle East Monitor*, June 19, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20150619-we-are-not-made-of-ink/>.

¹¹ Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), Xiii.

¹² *Ibid.*, 68.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, Xxxix.

reckon with the existential power and presence of *another* people with its land, its unfortunate history of suffering, its emotional and political investment in that land.”¹⁵

Solving this deadlock and strategizing a common future for both peoples, Said goes on to argue, necessitates three crucial shifts: Firstly, and against this brutal “negation” of “the Palestinian experience” that began with the early stages of Zionism in the 1880s, there is the need to contextualize the suffering inflicted by the Zionist project on Palestinians. This contextualization can be achieved by advancing “a broadly representative Palestinian position” which is “not very well known and certainly not well appreciated even now.”¹⁶

Secondly, Israel’s monopoly over trauma, manifest in how it fetishizes the Holocaust and refuses to recognize the Palestinian suffering it caused in its name, has to end. As Said puts it, the Israelis heavily rely on their traumatic history and continue to use it as an excuse to deny Palestinians their rights and “equat[e] the struggle for those rights with terrorism, genocide, anti-Semitism.”¹⁷ The Holocaust trauma should no longer be used to justify the continued traumatization of Palestinians:

To those Palestinian victims that Zionism displaced, it *cannot have meant anything by way of sufficient cause* that Jews were victims of European anti-Semitism and, given Israel’s continued oppression of Palestinians, few Palestinians are able to see beyond their reality, namely, that once victims themselves, Occidental Jews in Israel have become oppressors (of Palestinian Arabs and Oriental Jews).¹⁸

While there is and should be enough room to “sympathize with . . . the fear felt by most Jews that Israel’s security is a genuine protection against future genocidal attempts on

¹⁵ Ibid., 49.

¹⁶ Ibid., Xxxv.

¹⁷ Ibid., 231.

¹⁸ Ibid., 69.

the Jewish people,” Said argues that “there can be no way of satisfactorily conducting a life whose main concern is to prevent the past from recurring.”¹⁹ What this way of life enables, he adds, is a future of “fear” for the Palestinians, which will only allow Israel to “extend a century of violence against Palestinians for another long period of time.”²⁰ Only when both sides of the conflict can mutually recognize one another’s traumatic experiences and only when Israel decides to see *beyond* its historical trauma, can the ongoing suffering of Palestinians come to an end.

Together, these two shifts will bring about the third and final prerequisite for peace, namely, the realization on both parties that they “are now fully implicated in each others’ lives and political destinies.”²¹ Only then can “Palestine . . . become the site of two societies existing together, side by side, in peace and harmony.”²² As Said puts it,

In time, perhaps, such a thing [common existence] will be inevitable. Now of course it seems very far away. But if more Palestinians, more Jews and Americans, in short, if more people take up the question of Palestine as a matter for the common good of Palestinian Arabs and Israeli Jews, then the day will come soon enough.²³

Following Said’s line of thought, one can argue that post-1948 Palestinian literature emerged to put forth a “representative Palestinian position” and undo Israel’s violent effacement of Palestinian traumatic memory. Its first objective was to contest the Zionist colonial archive by, in Ann Laura Stoler’s words, “turn[ing] the colonial state’s technical armor to other purposes, [and]...dissemble[ing] its conceits.”²⁴ As it accommodated this project of counter-writing, Palestinian literature was able to retrieve the lost traces of Palestinian

¹⁹ Ibid., 231.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid., 49.

²² Ibid., 233.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Stoler, “On Archiving,” 47.

traumatic memory and re-inscribe them back into the historiography of Palestine/Israel, in the process challenging Israel's control over the archive. Its starting point was to resituate the *Nakbah* as the beginning of a Palestinian traumatic history that continues uninterrupted to this day. Another aim of this project was to reveal how Israel's settler-colonial enterprise legitimizes this ongoing traumatic reality.

Belonging to these “acts of countering” is Khoury's literary project which largely benefits from Edward Said's writings on Palestine and broaches the triad of history, trauma and memory.²⁵ This is true of his novels on post-war Lebanon as well as his Palestine-themed works. A celebrated journalist, literary scholar, novelist and editor, Khoury is recognized as a Lebanese by birth and Palestinian by identification. His commitment to Palestine is an old one and has manifested itself in a multitude of roles: once in his capacity as a *fidā'i* on the side of Palestinian fighters during the Lebanese Civil War, a second time as editor of the Beirut-based *Journal of Palestine Studies*, and finally in his inspiring vocation as storyteller of the Palestinian *Nakbah*.

Theoretical Framework

Following this overview of the *Nakbah* as the inaugural event of a Palestinian traumatic experience silenced by the Zionist enterprise and the project of counter-writing that emerged to defy this suppression of traumatic memory, I will now outline how I intend to answer the main questions guiding this thesis project, namely: How does Elias Khoury narrate multiple episodes of Palestinian traumatic memory? How does he emerge as a counter-writer who challenges Israel's silencing of Palestinian traumatic memory? And finally, how does his

²⁵ Ibid.

counter-writing go beyond the literary text to challenge historiographical biases and inspire political activism?

To respond to these questions, I choose three Palestine-themed novels from Khoury's rich oeuvre which unveil silenced phases in the post-1948 traumatic Palestinian experience and through which the particulars of Khoury's project of counter-writing can be traced. The first work is *The Kingdom of Strangers*, a 1993 Lebanese-war-themed novella. Written by Khoury immediately after the war, the novella counters Lebanon's institutionalized war amnesia and sheds light on the war-associated tragedies experienced by Lebanon's Palestinian refugee community. The second work is *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury's 1998 mega-novel which tells the story of the 1948 *Nakbah* especially focusing on the traumatizing loss of Palestine's Galilee. The novel reveals the collective trauma of Galilean peasants who for decades after the *Nakbah* grappled with their new refugee status in Lebanon's refugee camps. And finally, the third work is *Children of the Ghetto, My Name Is Adam*, a 2016 novel also centered on the *Nakbah*. The novel recounts the loss of Palestine's Lydda, charts its transformation into Israel's Lod, and reveals the ensuing ghettoization of Lydda's remaining Arab residents.

While each novel addresses a different moment in the post-1948 Palestinian experience of dispossession, all three come across trauma novels par excellence. In his book *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster*, Ronald Granofsky defines the trauma novel as a subgenre of fiction in which "the individual trauma at the center of the fictional world is linked to a general angst related in turn to the horrors seen to reside at the heart of human nature."²⁶ This novel follows the traumatized protagonist-cum-survivor of a

²⁶ Ronald Granofsky, *The Trauma Novel: Contemporary Symbolic Depictions of Collective Disaster* (New York: Peter Lang Inc., International Academic Publishers, 2012), 2, ProQuest Ebook Central, <https://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/aucegypt/detail.action?docID=1056624>.

man-made disaster on their “quest. . . for psychic balance or integration.”²⁷ As such, it shadows the survivor as he goes through the “different stages” that typically follow a traumatic event: from the fragmentation of the psyche as a result of a traumatic event, to the regression of trauma, and finally, if possible, it demonstrates the protagonist’s reunification with his ruptured self.²⁸ As he struggles through these post-trauma phases, the protagonist adopts a “retrospective point of view” which allows him to access his repressed trauma(s) and to consequently narrate them.²⁹

Following Granofsky’s definition of trauma writing, it can be argued that the three aforementioned works by Khoury qualify as trauma novels. Each is centered on a man-made disaster which dulls the protagonist’s experience of the world and leaves him battling with a psychic imbalance. Additionally, each emerges as the site of its distressed protagonist’s anxious search for “psychic balance.”³⁰ As he imagines his way to this sought-after equilibrium, each protagonist embarks on a fragmented journey of narrativity. To do so, he adopts a retrospective style of narration to tell, and subsequently work through, his older, repressed traumas.

In this thesis, I will trace how Khoury’s novels follow their protagonists as they seek to reclaim their psychic equilibrium. Towards that end, I will rely on mature psychoanalytic theory as developed in the work of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Throughout his scholarly vocation, Freud, celebrated as the “father of psychoanalysis,” dedicated much effort to understanding the human mind and theorizing about problems of the psyche. He developed his theory on psychoanalysis across multiple works, but the work I draw on here is his 1961

²⁷ Ibid., 8.

²⁸ Ibid., 107.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 8.

seminal book, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which, as James Strachey argues in a foreword note, “may be regarded as introducing the final phase” of his opinions on psychoanalysis.³¹ Freud was eager to respond to a troubling phenomenon that emerged post-World War I—whereby soldiers who had survived the war were haunted by repetitive dreams and flashbacks from the battlefield. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* was his attempt to make sense of this recurring phenomenon--how soldiers were gripped by a compulsiveness to repeat their traumatic experiences-- and to chart possibilities for psychoanalytic treatment.

Freud understands the repetitive re-enactments of trauma experienced by survivors of traumatic events as constitutive of an attack on their mental apparatus. He argues that the “cortical layer” is the outermost coating of the mental apparatus which “functions as a special envelope or membrane resistant to [external] stimuli.”³² As it resists external stimuli, it relies on the Pleasure Principle which mediates these incoming excitations and “keep[s] the quantity of excitation present . . . as low as possible or at least . . . keep[s] it constant” and hence saves the apparatus from the possibility of “unpleasure.”³³

In instances where the external stimuli are exceptionally “strong,” the Pleasure Principle fails at saving the organism from the possibility of “unpleasure” and the incoming stimuli “break through the protective shield” thus causing a “breach” in this “otherwise efficacious barrier.”³⁴

This breach prevents the survivor’s consciousness from processing the incoming stimuli, and the latter are immediately integrated into the mental apparatus without there being

³¹ Sigmund Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1961), xi.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid., 3.

³⁴ Ibid., 23.

a full realization of what occurred, i.e. the reality of the distressing incident is repressed. The result is “traumatic neurosis,” which leaves the survivor of a distressing event grappling with feelings of fear, fright and anxiety. This trauma, Freud argues, results from the survivor’s “lack of any preparedness for [the] anxiety” which occupies him when he experiences the traumatic event.³⁵

The mental apparatus reacts to this distressing event by going into a phase of silence, what Freud elsewhere describes as the ‘incubation period’ during which the survivor does not engage with the distressing event and no post-trauma symptoms can be located. Soon after, the un-comprehended traumatic event begins to haunt the traumatized survivor in the form of dreams, re-enactments or flashbacks, all three reactions of which happen involuntarily. Moreover, these symptoms are marred by repetition: the survivor is “repeatedly” brought back to “the situation of [the] accident” in their dreams.³⁶ As he re-lives the ‘accident’ and repetitively “wake[s] up in another fright,” the survivor is eventually able to comprehend and make sense of his repressed trauma, thus moving from “a passive into an active role.”³⁷ His repetitive performance of the distressing event allows him to “master” the so far repressed trauma by “developing the anxiety whose omission was the cause of the traumatic neurosis.”³⁸ This “compulsion to repeat” and the anxiety it enacts allow the survivor to convert “what is in itself unpleasurable into a subject to be recollected and worked over in the mind.”³⁹

I will rely on Freud’s theory of trauma to deliver a psychoanalytically informed reading of Khoury’s novels. By “psychoanalytically informed,” I mean a close reading that charts the

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

traumatized protagonist's journey through multiple post-trauma stages: from the rupture that attacks the mental apparatus and the ensuing repression of trauma, followed by the silent 'incubation' period that unfolds after a traumatic event, and finally the involuntary reenactments of the repressed event that haunt the traumatized individual "in a compulsively repetitive manner" in the form of "nightmares, flashbacks, anxiety attacks, and other forms of intrusively repetitive behavior."⁴⁰

Beyond Freud's trauma theory, I open up my research to the work of three modern trauma theorists who build on Freud's theory, albeit from different perspectives: Cathy Caruth, Dominick LaCapra and Marianne Hirsch.

Cathy Caruth (b.1955) is a trauma theorist and the Frank H. T. Rhodes Professor in the Department of English and Comparative Literature at Cornell University. Caruth's work centers on the relation of trauma vis-à-vis literature and her scholarly contributions to psychoanalysis revolve around the possibilities of narrativizing trauma. Trauma, Caruth implies, needs literature because the latter is capable of "ask[ing] what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways it simultaneously defies and demands our witness."⁴¹

Caruth has published widely on the subject of trauma. Some of her important works include: *Literature in the Ashes of History* (2013) and *Listening to Trauma: Conversations with Leaders in the Theory and Treatment of Catastrophic Experience* (2014). Guided by Caruth, I trace how the body of a literary text can become the site of trauma. Towards that end,

⁴⁰ Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 81.

⁴¹ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 5.

I draw on two of her works: *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996), and the edited volume *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995).

If Caruth approaches trauma from a literary perspective, American historian and prominent trauma theorist Dominick LaCapra (b.1939), the Bryce and Edith M. Bowmar Professor of Humanistic Studies at Cornell University, is interested in the relationship between trauma studies and historiography and in how narratives can bear witness to historical traumas and implicate the political projects that stand behind them. LaCapra's rich oeuvre includes: *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (1994), *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (1998), *History in Transit: Experience, Identity, Critical Theory* and *History and Its Limits: Human, Animal, Violence* (2009). For the purpose of this thesis, I draw on some of the psychoanalytic concepts he introduces in his 2001 seminal work, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*: the first being his differentiation between what he describes as two types of "performativity": *acting out* and *working through*.

LaCapra recaps the basic Freudian theory outlined above, namely how the period of silence that follows a distressing event attests to "the belated temporality of trauma."⁴² The silence is soon interrupted by a range of symptoms which haunt the survivor in an utterly involuntary manner and are not "subject to controlled, conscious recall."⁴³ The survivor unconsciously experiences the past traumatic event but is still unable to differentiate "between here and there, then and now."⁴⁴ This is what constitutes 'acting out,' during which "the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed."⁴⁵

⁴² LaCapra, *Writing History*, 81.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 89.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

As these repetitions ensue, the survivor eventually acquires the required anxiety that enables him to comprehend his trauma and start to *work it through*. This is when the “the past becomes accessible to recall in memory and when language functions to provide some measure of conscious control, critical distance, and perspective.”⁴⁶ The survivor “may never” acquire a “full transcendence of acting out (or being haunted by revenants and reliving the past in its shattering intensity)” but will at least develop “processes of judgement and at least limited liability and ethically responsible agency.”⁴⁷

I also draw on the concept of “empathic unsettlement,” a possibility enabled by psychoanalytic treatment whereby individuals can connect with “the traumatic experience of others, notably of victims” without the “appropriation of their experience.”⁴⁸ This possibility of empathy can be a powerful way of bringing different traumatic experiences together. It also allows for a contextualization of traumatic experiences, thus preventing the emergence of what LaCapra describes as “founding traumas.”⁴⁹ These are “traumas that paradoxically become the valorized or intensely cathected basis of identity for an individual or a group.”⁵⁰ They allow their survivors to fetishize their experiences, in turn becoming fixated on their own traumas and denying or belittling those experienced by others. To use LaCapra’s words, they “look at an earlier trauma as a way of not looking too closely at contemporary traumas.”⁵¹

Finally, I draw on the work of Holocaust trauma studies theorist Marianne Hirsch (b. 1949), the William Peterfield Trent Professor of English and Comparative Literature

⁴⁶ Ibid., 90.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 41.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., 171.

at Columbia University and Professor in the Institute for Research on Women, Gender, and Sexuality. Some of Hirsch's most important books include *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* (Columbia University Press, 2012), *Rites of Return: Diaspora, Poetics and the Politics of Memory*, co-edited with Nancy K. Miller (Columbia University Press, 2011) and *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative, and Postmemory* (1997).

Hirsch combines trauma with memory studies, especially focusing on intergenerational traumas and the possibilities and limitations they pose to second generations of trauma survivors. She tackles these issues in her concept of "postmemory." In her article, "The Generation of Postmemory," Hirsch defines postmemory as:

the relationship that the generation after those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they "remember" only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up. But these experiences were transmitted to them so deeply and actively as to seem to constitute memories in their own right.⁵²

Relying on the work of Caruth, Hirsch and LaCapra, I will show how Khoury's traumatized protagonists recover, comprehend and narrate their repressed traumas. I will trace how they open their traumas to narrativity, empathize with other traumatic experiences and finally I will show how they contextualize and mediate their inherited traumas. As they work through their traumas, all three protagonists move from a 'traumatic memory'—the "solitary activity" during which the protagonist grapples with recurring haunting symptoms and struggles to comprehend his traumatic experience, to a 'narrative memory' in which he is

⁵²Marianne Hirsch, "The Generation of Postmemory," *Poetics Today* 29, no.1 (Spring 2008): 106-107, <https://doi.org/10.1215/03335372-2007-019>.

finally able to talk about his story and launch his plea for help, his narration therefore transpiring as “a social act.”⁵³

I will trace how Khoury’s protagonists carry out conscious memory work in which they are able to recount their traumatic experiences, while being “able to distinguish between past and present and to recognize something as having happened to one (or one’s people) back then which is related to, but not identical with, here and now.”⁵⁴ As they narrate the past through “accurate. . . memory work,” our protagonists carry an “active forgetting of the past, or letting bygones be bygones.”⁵⁵ It is a forgetfulness which “allow[s] for critical judgement and reinvestment in life, notably social and civic life.”⁵⁶

It is important to mention that I dispute classical trauma theory’s methodological limitation, i.e. its focus on the inter-psychical and its subsequent exclusion of the historical and political triggers of traumatic events. As such, I position my theoretical framework within recent attempts in the academy to decolonize trauma studies by implicating the ethical and political limitations of trauma theory and re-politicizing the traumatic. Such re-politicization requires that we, as writers and researchers of trauma, grasp the extra-psychical possibilities of trauma. One way we can do that is by moving away from an “event-based model” of thinking about trauma to looking at ongoing traumatic events.⁵⁷ Instead of asking “what happened?” to capture the nuances of a traumatic incident, a question which “assumes that trauma is concentrated in an incident of the past, and that present circumstances are innocent of enduring

⁵³ Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onnon Van Der Hart, “The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma,” in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 163.

⁵⁴ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 66.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁵⁷ Norman Saadi Nikro, “Researching Trauma: Some Methodological Considerations for the Humanities,” *Meta Journal* 11 (2018): 18, <https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2018.11.7786>.

trauma, ” we shall begin asking ‘what is happening?’⁵⁸ This shift will allow us to capture the circumstances that cause trauma and to also implicate them.

Following these recent interventions in trauma theory, I will show how Khoury’s encoding of traumatic memory demonstrates how trauma both intersects with and is a product of external circumstances. I will argue that Khoury contextualizes trauma and connects it to the political and historical forces that produce it. His narration of trauma implicates structures of power that both cause and prolong this open wound. The Palestinian trauma that is captured in Khoury’s works is an ongoing wound primarily because the stressors of the traumatic event—as well as the grand narratives they uphold—are still active. The *Nakbah* therefore emerges as a continuing event.

Thesis Structure

In each chapter, I will offer a close reading of one novel. Read respectively, the three novels allow us to follow the different stages that make up Khoury’s construction of a Palestinian trauma narrative.

In chapter one, I look at *The Kingdom of Strangers* and argue that the protagonist’s narration becomes his way of both making sense of and surviving an ongoing traumatic event. His disjointed narration of trauma is powered by a sense of guilt over having survived a traumatic event while fellow Lebanese/Palestinians have died. His survival technique is to reenact stories of real-life heroes-cum-strangers who have been silenced in one way or another. He incorporates these real-life accounts of ‘strangers’ into his act of telling, the Palestinian for

⁵⁸ Ibid., 20.

his part emerging as one such stranger. We see how the Palestinian comes to have his share of suffering, once as an unwelcome refugee in Lebanon and a second time as the silenced Palestinian who is exiled from both home and history.

In chapter two, I move to *Gate of the Sun* and argue that Khoury presents a patchy collage of individual traumas that together tug at a collective Palestinian memory. Khalil follows in the footsteps of Scheherazade by engaging in an act of telling and retelling of the story of Palestinians since the unfolding of the *Nakbah*. He narrates Yunis' earlier traumatic moment, merging it with his own, but doing so for a whole different reason: unlike Yunis, Khalil wants to transcend the older generation's ongoing denial of trauma. I argue that Khalil chooses to work through his trauma by critically engaging with the Palestinian traumatic legacy and by refusing to take part in the fetishization of memory.

In chapter three, I look at *Children of the Ghetto, My Name Is Adam* and show how Adam responds to his personal trauma by metaphorizing Palestine, before a traumatizing encounter pushes him to give up allegory and tap into his older traumas. The second half of the novel becomes the site of Adam's acting out and working through of his trauma(s): he tells us of his family's survival during the Lydda massacre of 1948, how the Zionists transformed the city into a ghetto; and finally how this traumatic event, particularly its narration, was muted.

While much scholarly attention has been devoted to Elias Khoury's Palestine-themed works, his mega-project on Palestinian trauma writing remains understudied. Moreover, critical readings of Khoury's work have for the most part focused on single texts, without putting his different works in conversation with one another. This thesis project benefits from previous academic engagements with Khoury's work in as much as it seeks to tap into yet

unexplored aspects of the novelist's literary world. It does so by tracing continuities and abruptions between and across these different narratives. Moreover, choosing three texts that are years apart in publication time allows this project to uncover the different phases that make up Khoury's writing, particularly how he moves from shy attempts at an experimental mode of writing to highly deconstructive ways of narration.

The Kingdom of Strangers:
Inscribing the Lebanese Civil War Trauma

Introduction

In this chapter, I start by sketching an autobiography of Khoury as an entry point for speaking about his Palestine-themed novels. I argue that his personal and professional trajectories both shape and inspire his writing on Palestine. Next, I move to discussing Khoury's 1993 novella *Mamlakat al-ghurabā'* (*Kingdom of Strangers*, 1996) and situate it within a wave of anti-amnesia writing which emerged after the Lebanese Civil War (1975-1990). Next, I show how the novella's narrator-protagonist comes out of the war both defeated and traumatized. As victim-witness, he grapples with an overwhelming guilt which is compounded by his inability to capture the entirety of his trauma. He responds to this guilt by narrating the traumatic experiences of war victims, including those experienced by Lebanon's Palestinian refugee community who have their traumatic share of the war during the Shatila massacre and the subsequent War of the Camps. The text becomes the site of two concurrent traumas: the narrator's own trauma over having witnessed the war and survived it, followed by the traumatic experiences of Palestinian refugees inside Beirut's camps.

Khoury's Identification with Palestine

In a 2009 interview with Banipal magazine, Khoury attributes his early discovery of "Arab culture" to his grandmother.⁵⁹ He says that he grew "used to read[ing] classical Arabic poetry with her" and reminisces about how she "would recite most of the classical poetry by heart, all the poems of Imru' al-Qays."⁶⁰

⁵⁹ "Elias Khoury: Interview from Banipal," *Prague Writers' Festival*, January 15, 2009, http://www.pwf.cz/archivy/texts/interviews/elias-khoury-interview-from-banipal_1796.html.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

Khoury was born on July 12, 1948, itself the year of the Palestinian *Nakbah* whose political and historical implications would inform his future works. Born into an Orthodox Christian family, his father was a manager at the Mobil oil company and his mother was a housewife. He grew up and went to school in the East Beirut neighborhood of Ashrafiyya:

Ashrafiyya was a village inside a city. So I can say that my childhood had two aspects: it took place in a big city and was protected by a village inside the big city.... [it] had all the aspects of a village: the large olive orchard in Karm az-zaytun, the fields in Syufi, and the old yellow Beiruti houses surrounded by trees.⁶¹

Khoury's literary writing was inspired by his early encounter with literature. As intimated earlier, his grandmother's storytelling gave Khoury a firm grounding in the repertoire of classical Arabic literature and shaped his future attempts to "cross the frontiers between reality and the imaginary and to read life as a journey in unknown places."⁶² He was especially influenced by *Alf laylah wa-laylah (The Arabian Nights)* which introduced him to "the pleasure of story-telling" and revealed to him how "life in the village of Ashrafiyya was like a story."⁶³ His relationship with literature would only grow stronger over the following years, and his early discovery of Albert Camus's *The Stranger* would inspire him to identify himself "as a writer."⁶⁴ From this point on, Khoury became "obsessed with literature."⁶⁵

Khoury's scholarly interest in history and his commitment to challenging historiographical biases lie at the heart of his literary project. As a PhD student at the École Pratique des Hautes Études in the early 1970s, Khoury was stunned to discover that "the whole

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Robyn Creswell, "Elias Khoury, The Art of Fiction," *The Paris Review*, Spring 2017, <https://www.theparisreview.org/interviews/6940/elias-khoury-the-art-of-fiction-no-233-elias-khoury>.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

history of modern Lebanon was a history of civil war.”⁶⁶ From the 1840-1860 Mount Lebanon Civil War to the 1958 Lebanon crisis, this long episode of Lebanese traumatic memory was absent from historiographical works. Concerned that this undocumented history meant that the Lebanese “had no present, either,” Khoury took it upon himself to document missing episodes of Lebanon’s modern history in his literary writing.⁶⁷

Similarly, Beirut literary circles helped Khoury shape his historically-informed literary project. In the early seventies, he joined the editorial board of *Mawaqif*, a bimonthly cultural journal founded in 1968 by Syrian poet Ali Ahmad Said Esber (Adonis) and conceived of as “an organ of the Arab New Left.”⁶⁸ The journal had a progressive understanding of culture, its manifesto declaring that:

Culture [in this magazine] is struggle—the unity of thinking and doing. It is culture that does not intend to interpret the world, life, and the human person except for one purpose: to change the world, life, and the human person.⁶⁹

Within this progressive atmosphere, Khoury and other members of the *Mawaqif* group sought to throw off the shackles of the romantic school which had thus far “dominated” Lebanese literature.⁷⁰ Theirs was a protest against Arabic Romanticism and its poet-prophet archetype of Gibran Kahlil Gibran, both of which were a direct legacy of the *Nahdah*. They were specifically critical of the *Nahdah*’s repression of “the heritage of the *inhabit*” and “the heritage of the spoken and the lived.”⁷¹ Against these multiple repressions, Khoury and other

⁶⁶ “Elias Khoury in Beirut Review,” *Prague Writers’ Festival*, January 15, 2009, http://www.pwf.cz/archivy/texts/interviews/elias-khoury-in-beirut-review_1794.html.

⁶⁷ Creswell, “Elias Khoury.”

⁶⁸ Robyn Creswell, *City of Beginnings: Poetic Modernism in Beirut* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2019), 181.

<https://books.google.com.eg/books?id=XUBhDwAAQBAJ&lpg=PP1&pg=PP1#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Ibid.

writers of his generation were adamant on writing literary works that resembled the “very hybrid way of living.”⁷²

Khoury’s ideological inclinations and his life-long political activism seep into his literary works. His political disillusionment at the 1967 *Naksah* and the subsequent dispossession of 325,000 Palestinians, coupled with the advent of anti-colonialist movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America in the late sixties, inspired him to volunteer with Jordan-based *Fatah* when he was only 19. Reflecting on this experience in a 2012 interview with the *Daily Beast*, he says:

After the defeat of 1967, the flow of new Palestinian refugees was catastrophic. I thought at that time our moral engagement released us to fight back...We were in the Vietnam War, we were in Che Guevara, we were in a world where there was this central idea that we have to change the world, and we have to do all our best to change it...If you identified with the Palestinians, you had to do it. there was no other way.⁷³

Palestine is evidently central to Khoury’s literary project. There seems to be many reasons behind his identification with the Palestinian experience, primary among them is his early exposure to the Palestinian *Nakbah*. As an elementary school boy in the 1950s, Khoury befriended some of his Palestinian schoolmates who had just arrived in Lebanon as refugees following the 1948 *Nakbah*. His affinity with the Palestinian cause would continue to grow over the next years, manifested by how he spent his high school years teaching in the Palestinians camps of Beirut.⁷⁴ Furthermore, his volunteer work in the camps would decades

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Jacob Silverman, “Elias Khoury: Profile of the Essential Arab Novelist Today,” *The Daily Beast*, March 8, 2012, <https://www.thedailybeast.com/elias-khoury-profile-of-the-essential-arab-novelist-today>.

⁷⁴ Marcia Lynx Qualey, “Dinner with Elias Khoury,” *Your Middle East*, November 8, 2015, <https://yourmiddleeast.com/2015/11/08/dinner-with-elias-khoury/>.

later inspire him to collect stories from Lebanon's Palestinian refugees and rework them into a novel, culminating in his 2002 magnum opus *Gate of the Sun*.⁷⁵

Moreover, Khoury's involvement with Palestinian cultural life in Lebanon reinforced his identification with Palestine. For years he served as editor and researcher at *Shu'un Filastiniyah* (Journal of Palestinian Affairs), the PLO's official journal, then managed by Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish.⁷⁶ It was the early seventies; the heyday of the Palestinian national movement in Lebanon. The PLO had moved its guerrilla base to West Beirut following the events of *Aylul al-Aswad* (Black September, 16-27 September 1972) and the subsequent expulsion of Palestinian political leaders from Jordan.⁷⁷ Beirut quickly emerged as the center of Palestinian-armed struggle against Israel.⁷⁸

Khoury's involvement in the Lebanese Civil War on the side of the PLO-Lebanese National Movement coalition forces cannot be separated from his aforementioned commitment to the Palestinian cause.⁷⁹ He did not engage in direct warfare during the war but spent the War of the Camps "recross[ing] dangerous territory...delivering vital supplies to besieged friends and comrades."⁸⁰ Reflecting back on his years as a *fidā'i*, Khoury says that he "can do it again

⁷⁵ Guy Mannes-Abbott, "Elias Khoury: Myth and Memory in the Middle East," *The Independent*, November 18, 2005, <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/elias-khoury-myth-and-memory-in-the-middle-east-515728.html>.

⁷⁶ Jeremy Harding, "Jeremy Harding goes to Beirut to Meet the Novelist Elias Khoury," *London Review of Books*, November 16, 2006, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n22/jeremy-harding/jeremy-harding-goes-to-beirut-to-meet-the-novelist-elias-khoury>.

⁷⁷ Laleh Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007,) 50.

⁷⁸ Laleh Khalili, "Commemorating Battles and Massacres in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon," *American Behavioral Scientist* 51, no. 11 (July 2008): 1562, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0002764208316357>.

⁷⁹ Harding, "Jeremy Harding."

⁸⁰ Ibid.

now, if needed,” except that that he is now “wiser and can figure out whether it’s needed or not.”⁸¹

All these aspects come together in Khoury’s Palestinian trauma narratives, beginning with *The Kingdom of Strangers*. The novella was among a number of works penned by Khoury between the seventies and nineties with the Lebanese Civil War as their main theme. These included: *Little Mountain* (1977), *White Masks* (1981), *City Gates* (1981) and *The Journey of Little Gandhi* (1989).

Together, these works challenged the Lebanese parliament’s approval in August 1991 of general amnesty for all war-related crimes committed during the war.⁸² This amnesia project faultily accused Lebanon’s Palestinian refugee community of initiating the war, designating the Lebanese Civil War as “the war of/for the others.”⁸³ According to Craig Larkin, a Middle Eastern Studies scholar and Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics of the Middle East at King’s College London, placing the blame on Lebanon’s Palestinians allowed the Lebanese political establishment to put together “a blurred and superficial historiography that removed the need for critical examination, justice or remorse.”⁸⁴ Put differently, this historiographical repression helped war actors deny responsibility for the vast traumatization they inflicted on Lebanese and Palestinians alike.

⁸¹ Sophia Efthimiatiou, “Elias Khoury: Interview,” *Granta*, February 1, 2013, <https://granta.com/interview-elias-khoury/>.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Sune Haugbolle, “Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 25, no. 1 (2005): 198, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/185344>.

⁸⁴ Craig Larkin, “Beyond the War? The Lebanese Postmemory Experience,” *Int. J. Middle East Studies* 42 (2010), 618, 10.1017/S002074381000084X.

A group of post-war novelists, comprising Khoury, Rashid al-Daif, Hassan Daoud, Hoda Barakat, Rabi' Jabir, and Rabih Alameddine, among others, were adamant to write against this post-war amnesia and proceeded to re-inscribe the war's repressed traumatic memory into their works. According to Zeina Halabi, Assistant Professor of Arabic Literature at the American University of Beirut, these post-war novelists voiced their "anxieties about erasure and the interrupted work of national mourning," and thus put forth an image of the Lebanese intellectual "as a guardian of collective memory."⁸⁵ Moreover, some of them, including Khoury and Daif, were involved in the war, fighting alongside the PLO-Lebanese National Movement coalition. Their post-war writing was one way they could work through the apparent failure of their ideology, manifest in how the PLO-Lebanese coalition had lost the war, and to make sense of their subsequent post-war disillusionment. Khoury comments on this collective sense of defeat in a 2009 interview saying:

We were trying to build a new type of democratic and secular regime in a part of the world which had never experienced such a regime. It didn't work. We failed, and people like me were defeated.⁸⁶

The Kingdom of Strangers

The Kingdom of Strangers was published three years after the end of the Lebanese Civil War. An English translation by Paula Haydar appeared in 1996. Set during the war, the novella is in many ways a meditation on trauma as a by-product of man-made disasters. A disillusioned Lebanese narrator, himself a former PhD student of Palestinian folkloric memory at Columbia University, emerges out of the war as observer of trauma and traumatized survivor concurrently. As Beirut is reduced to rubble, he is frightened by the defeat of the human body in the face of war—the mangled body parts of Lebanese and Palestinian victims unsettle and

⁸⁵ Zeina G. Halabi, "The Unbearable Heaviness of Being: The Suicide of the Intellectual in Rabī' Jābir's *Rālf Rizqallāh through the Looking Glass*," *Journal of Arabic Literature* 44 (2013): 53, 10.1163/1570064x-12341256.

⁸⁶ "Elias Khoury in Beirut Review."

terrorize him. His trauma is exacerbated by his own defeat as a freedom fighter, suggestively on the side of the PLO-Lebanese National Movement coalition. The text follows him as he attempts to make sense of his war-induced trauma, interlacing his own narration of trauma with narratives by other Lebanese and Palestinian characters.

This novella presents itself as pure *mise en abîme* and captures the nuances of complex trauma that transpires in the lives of multiple ‘strangers’ following the end of the war. Khoury’s retrieval of Palestinian traumatic memory is achieved not by following a traditional plot structure but through a nonlinear and disjointed narrative. Stories blend onto stories, leading Dalia Said Mostafa to suggest that Khoury takes inspiration from Scheherazade, the famed storyteller of his favorite *Arabian Nights*.⁸⁷

Other characters in the novella include Mary, the narrator’s lover who accompanies him on walks around the streets of Beirut and engages in dialogic exchanges with him about writing and storytelling. There is also Emil, the narrator’s friend, himself an Israeli-officer-turned-PhD student at Columbia University who quits the Israeli army following the 1967 war. Of the Palestinian characters whose traumatic stories are recounted in the text there is the character of Ali Abu Tawq, also a friend of the narrator’s who is killed during the Shatila massacre; and Nabeela, another long-time friend of the narrator’s who is assassinated during the War of the Camps. There is also Faysal who loses his whole family during the Shatila massacre and is later killed during the War of the Camps. He is mourned by Dr. Yanu, a Shatila-based Palestinian doctor who witnesses the massacre first-hand and struggles with guilt over his inability to save the victims. Finally, there is the character of Fawzi al-Qawuqji, general

⁸⁷ Dalia Said Mostafa, “Literary Representations of Trauma, Memory, and Identity in the Novels of Elias Khoury and Rabī’ Jābir,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 40, no. 2 (2009): 228, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/25598005>.

commander of the 1948 Arab Rescue Army who survives the *Nakbah* and goes on to suffer from a jumbled-up memory.

Khoury's post-war trauma writing has received much scholarly attention. In her article "The Arab Artist's Role in Society: Three Case Studies: Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih and Elias Khoury," Mona Takieddine Amyuni argues that Khoury's post-war novels mirror "war-torn Beirut, dismembered Beirut, fragmented Beirut" by picturing the "torn up bodies, destroyed streets, decimated houses, lost stories, punctuated by the haunting refrain."⁸⁸

Nouri Gana further dwells on Khoury's trauma writing in his article "Formless Form: Elias Khoury's *City Gates* and the Poetics of Trauma." He argues that Khoury's post-war novels "bear witness to the traumatic event retrospectively, at the moment of its discursive recall and recreation."⁸⁹ Writing about Khoury's *City Gates*, another Lebanese-Civil-War-themed novel, Nouri asserts that the text "performs the unbearable plotlessness of trauma. . . even while submitting to the rhythmic vacillation between the repetition of trauma and the return to the traumatic event."⁹⁰

Khoury's literary style is the focus of a study by Karim Abuawad titled "Elias Khoury's *Little Mountain*: The Lebanese Civil War and the Aesthetics of Revolution." Abuawad argues that *Little Mountain*, which is also centered on the Lebanese Civil War, is an example of the "fragmentary narrative style for which many of Khoury's novels are known." He adds that "the novel's fragmentariness is most evident in the repetitive structure."⁹¹ In her article "Literary

⁸⁸ Mona Takieddine Amyuni, "The Arab Artist's Role in Society. Three Case Studies: Naguib Mahfouz, Tayeb Salih and Elias Khoury," *Arabic & Middle Eastern Literature* 2, no. 2, (1999): 215, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13666169908718225>.

⁸⁹ Nouri Gana, "Formless Form: Elias Khoury's *City Gates* and the Poetics of Trauma," *Comparative Literature Studies* 47, no. 4 (2010): 513, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/415268>.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 517.

⁹¹ Karim Abuawad, "Elias Khoury's *Little Mountain*: The Lebanese Civil War and the Aesthetics of Revolution," *Studies in the Novel* 49, no.1, (2017): 90, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/651486>.

Representations of Trauma, Memory, and Identity in the Novels of Elias Khoury and Rabī' Jābir," Dalia Said Mostafa suggests that Khoury's post-war writing is a "montage of countless images, details and remains, which are juxtaposed to one another in order to reflect a surrealist portrait of a disheveled man walking alone in a destroyed city."⁹²

Sune Haugbolle situates *The Kingdom of Strangers* within the aforementioned subgenre of first-person trauma writing which sought to counter the state-sponsored "culture of amnesia" that emerged after the war.⁹³ In a short review of the novella, Barbara Harlow finds much to appreciate about the novella's engagement with the "combined processes of narration and historiography" which "both complement and compete with each other in the contest for the record."⁹⁴ She adds that *The Kingdom of Strangers* presents "a case for the activism of stories in the continuing reconstruction of a historical record."⁹⁵ The novella's preoccupation with historiography is echoed in Fabio Caiani's article, "'My Name is Yālū,' The Development of Metafiction in Ilyās Khūrī's Work." Caiani reads the novella as an example of metafiction, describing it as a "text which includes a novel and also passages related to literary criticism."⁹⁶ He adds that Khoury's metafiction "promotes a reflection on the workings of human memory and the way history is written."⁹⁷

Who Killed the Storyteller?

As *The Kingdom of Strangers* opens, the narrator is standing before the Dead Sea, looking onto the Jordan Valley:

⁹² Mostafa, "Literary Representations of Trauma," 218.

⁹³ Haugbolle, "Public and Private Memory," 194.

⁹⁴ Barbara Harlow, review of *The Kingdom of Strangers*, by Paula Haydar and Elias Khoury, *Comparative Literature* 49, no.4 (Autumn 1997): 369, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1771538>.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Fabio Caiani, "'My Name is Yālū,' The Development of Metafiction in Ilyās Khūrī's Work," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10, no. 2 (2007): 139, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14752620701437523>.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 137.

All the stories I know and don't know came together there on the bank chipped out of that salty, gray sea. A gray sea that doesn't look like other seas, and behind us cities that slide down into the Jordan Valley as though being swallowed, one by one, down into the earth, down to a place that cannot be reached, to stories that go on and on, that seem to have no end.⁹⁸

Our first-person anonymous narrator is a writer and former PhD student of Palestinian folkloric memory at Columbia University. He has just returned from a trip to the Jordan Valley where he was suggestively involved in the Lebanese Civil War. According to Nouri Gana, the absence of the omniscient narrator typical of realistic fiction suggests that our narrator "is himself both alienated from himself and his surroundings."⁹⁹ Our narrator therefore emerges as a tragic hero.

The whole text alternates between the Dead Sea as the place from which he meditates on the ontology of his unfolding story, and Beirut whose war-torn streets and camps move the plot forward. In the next scene the narrator is back in Beirut with the bitter taste of defeat and engages in the following conversation with his beloved Mary:

And when does the story end?
When the storyteller dies.
And when does the storyteller die?
Here you have to change the question. You have to ask, 'Who killed the storyteller?
And who killed the storyteller?' she asked.
I don't know.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ Elias Khoury, *The Kingdom of Strangers*, trans. Paula Haydar (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1996), 8. The text in Arabic: "كل الحكايات التي أعرفها و لا أعرفها اجتمعت هناك، على تلك الضفة المكسورة من ذلك البحر المالح الذي كان لونه رماديا. بحر رمادي لا يشبه البحار، وخلفنا مدن تنزل نحو غور الأردن، كأنها تتساقط إلى تحت الأرض. إلى مكان لا يمكن الوصول إليه، إلى حكايات تدور وتدور و كأنها لا تنتهي."

⁹⁹ Gana "Formless Form," 529.

¹⁰⁰ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 8-9. The text in Arabic: "ومتى تنتهي القصة؟"

"حين يموت الراوي."

"ومتى يموت الراوي؟"

"هنا يجب تغيير السؤال، يجب أن تسألني من قتل الراوي."

"ومن قتل الراوي؟"، سألت.

"لا أعرف."

Two tensions set the tone for the ensuing narrative: the killing of the storyteller as a result of post-war amnesia: “And who killed the storyteller?” and the traumatic stories he has come to witness: “stories that go on and on, that seem to have no end.” Both tensions are further compounded by the narrator’s own trauma which he reveals when he describes having returned from the Jordan Valley “with memories” “covering him, “rather than dust” and his “desire for life now dry and bitter.”¹⁰¹

The narrator’s trauma, as the text slowly reveals, emanates from his own sense of defeat following his loss in the war:

I told her [Samia] we would change the world. I spoke to her about changing the world not knowing what I was saying. I said we would change the world, because that’s what we used to say.¹⁰²

Instead of changing the world, the disillusioned narrator and his fellow comrades come face to face with death:

Has the world changed? she asked. This time she didn’t hesitate when she asked, and she didn’t swallow half of her words as she always did. I was the one who hesitated, for I hadn’t changed the world. But I had discovered the most basic thing, the most commonplace and naïve thing. I discovered that I was going to die, because men die. When I discovered the world, death changed, or vice versa—when I discovered death, the world changed. I didn’t change it. I saw it. and when I saw, everything changed—I and he and you and she.¹⁰³

Following Freud’s theory of trauma, we see how the Lebanese Civil War trauma assaults the narrator’s mental apparatus, causing a rupture in the outermost cortical layer, i.e.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 8. The text in Arabic: "عندما رجعت هذه المرة و الذكريات تغطيني بدل الغبار، ورغبة الحياة صار طعمها مرا و ناشفا"

¹⁰² Ibid.,9. The text in Arabic: "الحقيقة أنني قلت لها بأننا سنغير العالم. حدثتها عن تغيير العالم من غير أن أعني ما أقول. قلت نغير العالم لأننا كنا نقول ذلك."

¹⁰³ Ibid.,10. The text in Arabic: ""هل تغير العالم؟"، سألت. هذه المرة لم تتلعثم حين سألت، ولم تبتلع نصف كلماتها كما كانت تفعل دائما. أنا الذي تلعثم، فأنا لم أغير العالم، ولكنني اكتشفت أبسط الأشياء وأكثرها بداهة و سذاجة، اكتشفت أنني ساموت لأن الإنسان يموت، و عندما اكتشفت العالم تغير الموت أو بالعكس، عندما اكتشفت الموت تغير العالم. أنا لم أغيره، أنا رأيته، وحين رأيت تغير كل شيء، أنا وهو وأنتم وهي."

his consciousness. The Pleasure Principle is unable to protect the mental apparatus from these invading excitations. As such, these external stimuli pass through the mental apparatus with their “original intensity” and without any mediation, thus resulting in traumatic neurosis.¹⁰⁴ According to Cathy Caruth, the result of this invasion is a “breach in the mind’s experience of time, self, and the world.”¹⁰⁵ The traumatic event—in this case the Lebanese Civil War—is “experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness.”¹⁰⁶ Because it overwhelms consciousness’ ability to capture it in its entirety, the event circumvents the mental apparatus’ cortical layer without being “registered” in the victim’s consciousness.¹⁰⁷

The narrator’s “When I saw, everything changed” is an indication of the breach that occurs in his own experience of the world: He goes from wanting to change his surroundings, as is evidenced by his involvement in the war, to experiencing defeat and stumbling upon death. His “I didn’t change it. I saw it” signals the opening of this rupture. But it is a rupture exacerbated by an excessive feeling of guilt which is noticeable when he says: “The only flaw in my story is that I didn’t die.”¹⁰⁸ The narrator’s feeling of defeat is aggravated by the fact that he has witnessed a traumatic event and stayed alive. As a survivor of trauma, he is overridden with guilt, what in trauma literature is described as “the syndrome of the survivor of extreme situations.”¹⁰⁹ According to Caruth, this sense of guilt exemplifies how “survival itself...can be a crisis.”¹¹⁰

Having communicated his guilt, he announces his narrative intention as follows:

¹⁰⁴ Freud, *Beyond*, xi.

¹⁰⁵ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 4.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

¹⁰⁸ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 15. The text in Arabic: "الخلل الوحيد في حكايتي هو أنني لم أمت."

¹⁰⁹ Angela Connolly, “Healing the Wounds of our Fathers: Intergenerational Trauma, Memory, Symbolization and Narrative,” *Journal of Analytical Psychology* 56 (2011): 608, <http://doi.org/0021-8774/2011/5605/607>.

¹¹⁰ Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 9.

This is how the living absolve themselves of having betrayed the dead, with a few sympathetic words about them that have absolutely no meaning. We betray the dead, constantly. Writing about them is the ultimate betrayal of the dead. No, this is not correct. The very fact that we continue to live, in spite of all this death, is the ultimate betrayal. And we take refuge in memories to avoid being disloyal.¹¹¹

And a second time when he says: “Heroes die. We, on the other hand, tell their stories.”¹¹² It is this very guiltiness over having survived while others have died that motivates the act of storytelling that follows. As the narrative unfolds, our narrator repeatedly asks: “What am I writing about?”¹¹³ His answer comes in the form of an internally fragmented narration of traumas as experienced by himself and others. He launches his narrative from the heart of Lebanon’s devastated refugee camps.

Inside Shatila Camp: Mapping Palestinian Trauma

In a photo-text series titled “The City that Exploded Slowly,” Leslie Hakim-Dowek, a London based artist of Lebanese origin, counters Lebanese war amnesia by embarking on “a process of mental mapping” in which she “mark[s] the sites of violence, personal trauma and the ever-shifting boundaries in a city seen in a constant process of erosion and dissolution.”¹¹⁴ She describes her photographic journey as a “memento mori that makes real a loss and helps one to apprehend it by capturing a reality that we would otherwise not see.”¹¹⁵

¹¹¹ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 17. The text in Arabic: "هكذا يبرر الأحياء خياناتهم للموتى ببعض الكلمات العاطفية التي لا معنى لها. لكن هذا ليس صحيحاً. مجرد استمرارنا في الحياة رغم كل هذا الموت، هو خيانة. نحن نخون الموتى بشكل دائم، الكتابة عنهم هي ذروة خيانتهم. ولذلك نلجأ للذكريات كي لا نخون."

¹¹² Ibid., 10. The text in Arabic: "الأبطال يموتون، و أما نحن فنروي حكاياتهم."

¹¹³ Ibid., 9. The text in Arabic: "عم أكتب؟"

¹¹⁴ Leslie Hakim-Dowek, “The City that Exploded Slowly,” *Contemporary French and Francophone Studies* 18, no.5 (2014): 587, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17409292.2014.976383>.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 588.

Following in Dowek's steps, the narrator, who besides the clear intention of countering amnesia is narrating his own trauma and trying to work it through, sets off to mark the sites of trauma in war-torn Beirut. He launches his quest from the very heart of Shatila camp where he goes "searching for the story and the heroes."¹¹⁶

As mentioned earlier, the PLO's political and military power peaked in the early seventies. Following its expulsion from Jordan in 1970, the organization quickly transformed Lebanon into its new guerilla base. This transformation was in large part enabled by the Cairo Accords (2 November 1969) "which granted administrative autonomy to the Palestinian refugee camps" and "allowed the use of Lebanese territories as a base for attacking vital Israeli positions."¹¹⁷ Now in Beirut, the PLO's immediate goal was to control the camps and recruit future guerilla fighters. Soon enough, the organization was launching guerilla attacks on Israel from its south Lebanon base, the latter therefore emerging as the site of fierce Israeli retaliations. While the PLO had the fervent support of Lebanon's leftist organizations, the rest of Lebanese society was increasingly polarized about the Palestinian issue. When the Lebanese Civil War erupted in 1975, the animosity towards Palestinians had reached a new height, manifest in how Lebanon's Palestinian camps were punished for supporting the PLO and reportedly dragging Lebanon into warfare with Israel.

One such punishment came on 16 September 1982 when the Sabra and Shatila camps came under heinous attacks by Lebanese Phalange militias, culminating in the Sabra and Shatila massacres (16-18 September 1982). PLO leaders and militants had just been ousted from Lebanon following the 1982 Israeli invasion of Beirut and the ensuing forced

¹¹⁶ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 85. The text in Arabic: "كنت أبحث عن الحكاية و عن أبطالها."

¹¹⁷ Zeina Halabi, "Exclusion and Identity in Lebanon's Palestinian Refugee Camps: A Story of Sustained Conflict," *Environment & Urbanization* 16, no. 2 (2004): 40, <https://doi.org/10.1630/0956247042309928>.

disarmament of the camps.¹¹⁸ Adamant to totally crush the remaining Palestinian refugee community, Phalange militias stormed the disarmed camps with the support of West Beirut-based Israeli forces and over the span of 43 hours killed thousands of Palestinian refugees. After the massacres, the Palestinian refugee community “retreated further into the camps, became more suspicious of the Lebanese state and the non-refugee population, and vowed never to disarm the camps again.”¹¹⁹

A second equally traumatic moment came with the Second War of the Camps (1985-1988) when intermittent sieges of a number of refugee camps, including the camps of Sabra and Shatila, caused widescale destruction of both sites. Behind this siege warfare stood Amal, a Syria-backed Shiite political organization. As mentioned earlier, the PLO had spent the years prior to its expulsion from Lebanon launching guerrilla attacks against Israel from its base in south Lebanon, in turn prompting Israeli reprisal attacks. Many Shiite families were displaced as a result and relocated to south Beirut, where they took refuge in the same shanty towns and camps that accommodated the Palestinian refugee community.¹²⁰ When in the mid-eighties the PLO launched attempts to reclaim its military and political power in Beirut, the Shiites, backed by Syria and still bitter over their displacement as a result of Palestinian guerilla warfare, crushed the PLO’s hopes for re-armament by launching a fierce siege on the camps.¹²¹

Both the Sabra and Shatila massacres and the Second War of the Camps are strongly present in *The Kingdom of Strangers*. Visiting Shatila camp on March 14, 1987, one day after the end of the War of the Camps, the narrator describes the wide-scale destruction he sees:

¹¹⁸ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 8.

¹¹⁹ Agnes Czajka, “Discursive Constructions of Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon: From the Israel-Hezbollah War to the Struggle over Nahr al-Bared,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 32, no. 1 (2012): 243, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/475280>.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

¹²¹ Halabi, “Exclusion and Identity,” 41.

In her book, *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*, Laleh Khalili, Professor of Middle Eastern Politics at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), the University of London, argues that “grave markers” emerged as icons of post-war Beirut. They were placed in unpredicted places inside the camps—from mosques to schools to “testify to urgent burials during sieges.”¹²⁶ In the same vein, the novella reveals how the huge number of massacre victims necessitated their burial in a “mass graveyard” built in the camp. Later on in the novella, the narrator is accompanied by another Palestinian refugee, Samia, to that same graveyard. When they arrive, Samia looks onto the graveyard and refers to such mass burial by saying: “They’re all here. . . All of them—Ali, and Faysal, and everyone.”¹²⁷

Khalili argues that Shatila camp’s mass graves “contain hints that render a history of carnage legible to attentive eyes.”¹²⁸ Following the same line of thought, the narrator’s description of the violence inflicted on the human body renders the war trauma legible and reterritorializes it. The murdered refugees who are denied a lawful burial— “Ali, and Faysal, and everyone” are “*all here*” (My italics).

The violation of the human body also underpins the story of Nabeela, a childhood friend of the narrator. Nabeela was assassinated during the War of the Camps. Her car was stopped by “three armed men” and she immediately knew that “they had come to take her life”:

¹²⁶ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 6.

¹²⁷ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 101. The text in Arabic: "قلت. "كلهم هنا، علي وفيصل وأنا و أنت ""

¹²⁸ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 6.

Maybe she heard the first shot; then her body began to be ripped apart as it was strewn on the sidewalk in splotches of water and blood. . . Nabeela was left there, tossed into the street, near Hamada's barbecue restaurant.¹²⁹

Here again, the body is violated even following its demise. After it is "ripped apart" and "strewn on the sidewalk in splotches of water and blood," Nabeela's body is "left there, tossed into the street," and kept from the decent burial it deserves. Furthermore, and to exacerbate this encroachment on human dignity, the body is left in close proximity to Hamada's barbecue restaurant." It is exposed and left to rot in the street.

By stopping over the ruins of the camp and particularizing the bodily harm inflicted on its residents, the narrator follows in the footsteps of classical Arab poets who, in weeping over *al-atlāl*, "transmute loss and destruction into yearning for the concrete embodiments of human dignity."¹³⁰ Moreover, attaching Palestinian trauma to the Lebanese camp space allows the narrator to counter the post-war institutionalized amnesia. His remapping of the war trauma is proof that both the Sabra and Shatila massacre and the Second War of the Camps did take place and is a strong implication of the political stressors that caused them in the first place.

The next section traces the narrator's account of Lebanese Civil War trauma as experienced by its Palestinian victims.

The Refugee as 'Stranger' and the Narrativization of Trauma

¹²⁹ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 95. The text in Arabic: "سمعت الطلقة الأولى ربما، ثم بدأ جسدها يتمزق وهو ينتشر على الرصيف كبقع من المياه والدم. المسلحون غادروا المكان بهدوء وكأنهم لم يفعلوا شيئاً، وبقيت نبيلة مرمية وسط الشارع، قرب مطعم "حمادة" للفراريج المشوية."

¹³⁰ Seignourie, "Anointing with Rubble," 54.

A normal, everyday activity—a family coming together to watch TV, is disrupted by the “sound” of “flare bombs” dropped on the camp—upon which “the bodies start to fall” and “pile up on top of one another.” As he recounts the story, Faysal denotes how “the bodies were heavy.”¹³⁴ That Faysal chooses the words “fall,” “pile up,” and “heavy” as euphemisms for ‘murder’ is symptomatic of his denial of his family’s death. This sense of denial is immediately superseded by a fear of death:

He crawled over and lay down between his seven brothers and sisters and his mother, who had all been killed by the bullets of those who entered Shatila Refugee Camp the night of September 16, 1982. He did among the dead to make it look as though he were dead, but he wasn’t.¹³⁵

When the Phalangists left, Faysal “ran into the street. Then “he crawled between the corpses—those black, bloated corpses, surprised by death . . . until he got to where the foreign reporters were stationed, and there he passed out.”¹³⁶ Here, we come across the “fright and the threat to life” experienced by the survivor of traumatic neurosis.¹³⁷ It is precisely Faysal’s “lack of . . . preparedness for anxiety,” that leaves him traumatized.¹³⁸ Later on in the narrative we learn that Faysal: “slept from one to five o’clock in the morning; then he started running.¹³⁹ When he saw the foreign reporters, he crouched on the ground and *didn’t speak*” (My italics).¹⁴⁰

Faysal’s first reaction to the traumatic event is that of fear, followed by flight, and then sleep: He “ran into the street” then “passed out” then “crouched on the ground and didn’t

¹³⁴ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "كانت الأجساد ثقيلة"

¹³⁵ Ibid., 27. The text in Arabic: "تكدس الجميع وكان فيصل قد أصيب بثلاث رصاصات في خصرته ويده. زحف ونام بين أشقاءه وشقيقاته السبع وأمه الذين ماتوا برصاص الذين دخلوا مخيم شاتيل ليل ١٦ أيلول ١٩٨٢. تغطي بالموت كي يوحي بأنه ميت، ولم يكن ميتاً."

¹³⁶ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "وحين غادر المسلحون، ركض في الشارع، ثم صار يزحف وسط الجثث الأفقية التي وصف جان جينييه سوادها وانتفاخها ودهشتها في الموت، حتى وصل إلى حيث الصحفيون الأجانب، وهناك أغمي عليه."

¹³⁷ Freud, *Beyond*, 25.

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 87.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "نام من الواحدة فجرا حتى الخامسة صباحا، ثم بدأ يركض، وعندما رأى الصحفيين الأجانب تكوم على الأرض، ولم يحك."

speak.” I read this period of silence--“didn’t speak” --as characteristic of the incubation period that follows the traumatic event. Soon enough, the repressed trauma begins to haunt Faysal in the form of flashbacks which gradually help him grasp what happened. Only when he starts relaying the story to our narrator does Faysal shift from a traumatic memory to a narrative memory, his telling of the traumatic event thus emerging as a “social act.”¹⁴¹

Bringing about this shift from traumatic to narrative memory is proof that Faysal is far from passive about his trauma. Rather, it is his very sense of agency that enables his narrativization of the traumatic event. This shift from traumatic to narrative memory is enabled by Freud’s “*Nachträglichkeit*,” which is also known as the process of “meaning- making” or “appraisal” whereby the traumatized subject determines “what is traumatic and what is not” before proceeding to narrate their traumas.¹⁴²

This process of meaning-making surfaces again in the story of Dr. Yanu, a Greek doctor in the Shatila camp who loses his close friend, Ali, during the Second War of the Camps. Dr. Yanu’s narrative opens with the following lines:

I knew he was dead, but I couldn’t believe it...His chest was split open, and he was dead. I took him in my arms the way I would hold a baby . . . I put him down on the floor and told everyone to leave . . . I ripped open his shirt and saw the wounds and the shrapnel and the blood that had ceased to flow as though something had blocked it—like a dam . . . I learned about death from eyes. Eyes wilt all of a sudden, just as flowers do.¹⁴³

¹⁴¹ Kolk and Hart, “The Intrusive Past,” 163.

¹⁴² Kholoud Saber Barakat and Pierre Philippon, “Beyond Trauma, What Kept them Going? An Analysis of the Lives and Narratives of five Syrian Women in Lebanon,” *Meta Journal* 11 (2018): 48-50, <https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2018.11.7802>.

¹⁴³ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 17-18. The text in Arabic: "كنت أعرف أنه مات، لكنني لم أصدق...كان منبوحاً في صدره وميتاً...أخذته منهم وحملته بين ذراعي وكأني أحمل طفلاً...وضعته على الأرض وقلت لهم أن يخرجوا...مزقت القميص ورأيت الجروح والشظايا والدم الذي كان قد توقف عن التدفق وكان هناك شيئاً منعه، كأن سداً أقيم ليمنع الماء...عرفت الموت من العينين. فجأة تذبل العيون كما تذبل الزهور."

Like Faysal, Yanu's first reaction to Ali's death is that of denial: "I knew he was dead, but I couldn't believe it." It is when death manifests itself through "the blood that had ceased to flow" that Yanu is forced to acknowledge it as a reality. Upon his realization of his friend's death, Dr. Yanu's second reaction is that of guilt over his failure to save Faysal's life:

The body was trembling, and I, the doctor who had saved the lives of hundreds of wounded men and women, found myself incapable of saving his . . . The day Ali died, the miracles stopped working. I saw death and felt completely powerless . . . I wanted to massage his shaking body and help the soul to leave. But I didn't dare. I was afraid. I sat beside him and I was afraid.¹⁴⁴

Here again, the traumatized individual conveys the need to pass out:

When his body relaxed, I felt I was going to faint, that I needed to sleep. I almost did fall asleep . . . I slept for ten hours straight . . . I slept like the dead. I didn't hear the bombs, and I didn't dream of anything¹⁴⁵.

Like other victims-witnesses, the flashbacks that occur in the aftermath of the traumatic incident eventually allow Dr. Yanu to register the details of both massacres and to accordingly narrate them to our narrator.

Narrative Memory and the Ongoing *Nakbah*

One of the narratives that emerge in the text is that of Fawzi al-Qawuqji, who we learn was general commander of the Arab Rescue Army in 1948. Our narrator meets al-Qawuqji at the Palestine Research Center in Beirut, where now at the age of 70, al-Qawuqji is not only

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 18-19. The text in Arabic: "كان الجسد ينفض وأنا الطبيب الذي أنقذ حيوات مئات الجرحى وجدت نفسي عاجزا عن إنقاذ حياته. كان هذا الرجل أقرب إنسان إلي... يوم علي سقطت الأعجوبة، ورأيت الموت وأحسست بالعجز المطلق... أردت أن أدلك الجسد المرتجف أمامي كي أساعد الروح على الذهاب. ولكنني لم أجرؤ، خفت، جلست إلى جانبه وكنت خائفا."

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 19. The text in Arabic: "وعندما همد جسده أحسست بما يشبه الإغماء. أحسست بحاجة إلى النوم. كدت أنام... نمت عشر ساعات متواصلة، نمت كالقتيل، ولم أسمع القذائف ولم أحلم بشيء."

eager to show his war wounds to his audience but is also adamant on relaying his own trauma narrative:

Then he put his right leg up on the chair and rolled up the bottom of his pants to show us the scars. "Nine bullets," he said. The hair on al-Qawuqji's long, white leg had long since fallen out, leaving behind nothing but dark grooves all over his leg.¹⁴⁶

al-Qawuqji then rolls down his pant leg and proceeds to narrate his own experience of the *Nakbah*:

He told us how the armies joined forces in the Jordan Valley, about the various cavalry units that met there and how they crossed the river to Palestine. But he wasn't telling the truth. The cavalry units he told us about had actually met in the valley in 1936, not 1948. In 1936, al-Qawuqji was leading a group of volunteers. In 1948, he was in command of an army. But when he stood before us to tell the story, he didn't distinguish between the two wars . . . we listened to him and believed him. Why not believe him? What's the difference between 1936 and 1948?¹⁴⁷

Having lived through and taken part in both the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt and the 1948 Arab-Israeli War, al-Qawuqji mixes up details of both war experiences, so that both 1936 and 1948 became one and the same: "But he wasn't telling the truth. The cavalry units he told us about had actually met in the valley in 1936, not 1948."

Caruth translates jumbled recollections as a natural consequence of the narrativization of trauma, when the very "transformation" of a traumatic event into a "narrative memory" loses "both the precision and the force that characterizes traumatic recall."¹⁴⁸ She adds that "the

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 11. The text in Arabic: "ثم وضع رجله اليمنى على الكرسي ورفع بنطلونه إلى الأعلى، فرأينا آثار الرصاص... تسع رصاصات"، قال...

كانت رجل الفاوقجي اليمنى طويلة وبيضاء، وقد نساقت الشعر منها، ولم يبق سوى أخاديد داكنة تخترقها في كل الأماكن..."
¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 12. The text in Arabic: "روى عن التجمع في غور الأردن، عن مجموعات الفرسان التي التقت في الغور وكيف قطعت النهر إلى فلسطين. ولكن لم يكن بخير الحقيقة. مجموعات الفرسان التي أخبرنا عنها التقت في الغور عام ١٩٣٦ لا عام ١٩٤٨. عام ١٩٣٦ كان واستمعنا إليه وصدقناه. يقود كوكبة من المتطوعين و عام ١٩٤٨ كان يقود جيشا. ولكنه حين وقف أمامنا ليروي لم يميز بين الحربين. الفاوقجي لماذا لم نصدق؟ ما الفرق بين ١٩٣٦ و ١٩٤٨؟"

¹⁴⁸ Cathy Caruth, "Introduction, Part II," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 154.

capacity to elide or distort . . . may mean the capacity simply to forget.”¹⁴⁹ As such, the precision of the traumatic event is traded for relief from its painful traces. This idea of forgetfulness as an act of healing emerges again when the narrator speaks of Ali, a Palestinian refugee who experienced the events of Black September in Jordan and was killed during the First War of the Camps. He wonders how Ali may have narrated both traumatic experiences had he survived to this day:

Would he find enough space in his memory to differentiate between the battle of September 1970 in Jordan and the 1985 siege of Shatila Refugee Camp in Beirut? Or would he forget a little and tell us about Samia, as if she had been his comrade at the Freedom Fighter Base in Ghawr al-Safi, and about his children who are studying in Amman even though they were going to study in Tunis?¹⁵⁰

While I agree that the forgetfulness-as-healing argument outlined by Caruth applies to both al-Qawuqji and Ali, I also read this memory confusion as itself symptomatic of a *continuing* trauma. In al-Qawuqji’s case, it is precisely the dispossession of Palestinians that starts in 1948 and the fact that it is a continuing reality (as manifested by Black September and the Lebanese Civil War) that jumbles up his memory. This explains why, as Nouri Gana argues, the very description of the Lebanese Civil War as *sectarian* “ambiguates the historical events” that stood behind the war.¹⁵¹ He adds that it is the *Nakbah* and the *Naksah* which lead to “the creation and intensification of the Palestinian refugee problem, the phenomenon that is believed to be at the origin of the Lebanese Civil War in the first place.”¹⁵² As such, it is the ongoing Palestinian refugee problem as a byproduct of the Zionist project that exposes

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 13. The text in Arabic: "هل سيجد متسعاً في الذاكرة ليميز بين معارك أيلول ١٩٧٠ في الأردن، وبين حصار مخيم شاتيلا في بيروت عام ١٩٨٥؟ أم كان سينسى قليلاً، ويخبرنا عن سامية وكأنها كانت رفيقته في قواعد الفدائيين في "غور الصافي" ويحدثنا عن أولاده الذين يدرسون في عمان، مع أنهم كانوا سيدرسون في تونس؟"

¹⁵¹ Gana, "Formless Form," 506-507.

¹⁵² Ibid,

Lebanon's Palestinian refugee community to the war and therefore prolongs their trauma. The trauma has not happened but is *happening*. The *Nakbah* is not an event. It is an enduring reality.

That the Lebanese war trauma is in part a product of the Zionist enterprise is further confirmed by Faysal's unrealized dream of return:

I dreamt that all of us from the camp were on trucks, will all our belongings, except now we were returning to Palestine . . . And only in the dream did we arrive in Palestine.' . . . And then I woke up.¹⁵³

Faysal's return is inconceivable. It is his continued presence in the camp, *outside* Palestine, that brings about his death. He lives his life "searching for a way to go to Palestine" except that "Palestine came to him in 1987, in the form of a bullet in the head, and a grave in the mosque."¹⁵⁴

Traumas as Mirrors

Emil told the story. He told how his father, Albert, fled Poland and went to Palestine. Albert Azayev [Emil's father] was walking along one of the streets of Sofia when he saw the truck taking Jewish prisoners to the death camps. He saw his only brother aboard the truck. He could see his head through the barbed wire. Albert saw his brother and clung to the wall. He had searched for a place to hide, but found only the wall. He clung to it, trembling (24 ends there) with fear. Just then the brother started to scream.¹⁵⁵

As the novella progresses, we learn that our narrator was a PhD student of Palestinian folkloric memory at the University of Columbia, New York. There, he befriends Emil Azayev, an Israeli student and son of a Holocaust survivor who eventually settles in Israel with the help

¹⁵³ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 26. The text in Arabic: "شفيت انه إحنا، أهالي المخيم، راكبين شاحنات وحاملين أغراضنا، بس قال راجعين على فلسطين...وصلنا إلى فلسطين..بس لحظتها فقت."

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 87. The text in Arabic: "كان يبحث عن طريقة للذهاب إلى فلسطين. فلسطين جاءتة عام ١٩٨٧ على شكل طلقة في الرأس، وقبر في الجامع."

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 25. The text in Arabic: "روى إميل. روى كيف هرب والده ألبير من بولندا إلى فلسطين. كان ألبير أزايف بمشي في أحد شوارع صوفيا عندما رأى الشاحنة التي تنقل المعتقلين اليهود الذين كانوا يؤخذون إلى معسكرات الإبادة والموت. وفي الشاحنة رأى شقيقه الوحيد. كان رأس الأخير يظهر من النافذة المغلقة بالأسلاك. رأى ألبير شقيقه والتصق بالحائط، كان يبحث عن مكان يهرب إليه، فلم يجد سوى الحائط، التصق به وهو يرتجف من الخوف. وهنا بدأ السجين يصرخ"

of the Jewish fund. As our narrator continues his narrativization of trauma, he allows Emil the space inside the text to relay his family's Holocaust trauma. To this day, Emil still remembers how his father's trembled voice as he told him the story:

He told the story to this son only once, and in Emil's mind, the matter remained forever ambiguous. When his father told him the story, he was all choked up, and his voice was filled with terror.¹⁵⁶

The fact that the story remained "forever ambiguous" in Emil's mind is in and of itself symptomatic of a traumatic memory in which the event is not available for "conscious recall" and is therefore not narratable.¹⁵⁷ While it is true that Emil has not experienced the trauma himself, he inherits the trauma as a second-generation Holocaust survivor.

By opening up the text to Jewish traumatic memory, the narrator creates an 'empathic unsettlement' with Emil's story. He relates to Emil's family's story of Holocaust survival. But alas, this moment of empathic unsettlement is immediately filled with tension. As the dialogic exchange unfolds, Emil tells the narrator that despite his harrowing Holocaust experience, his "father didn't want to return to Palestine." To which the narrator immediately replies: "You mean go."¹⁵⁸

Here a tension arises between the words "return" and "go." While the narrator evidently recognizes Jewish traumatic history, a recognition enabled by his own activation of empathy, he does not claim this trauma as his own. The space he maintains between himself and the traumatic event allows him to recognize that while the Holocaust has had a traumatic effect on

¹⁵⁶ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "روى الحكاية لابنه مرة واحدة، وبقيت المسألة غامضة في ذهن إميل. الأب حين روى كان صوته يتقطع بالذعر."

¹⁵⁷ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 89.

¹⁵⁸ Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 25. The text in Arabic: "لم يكن أبي يريد العودة إلى فلسطين"، قال إميل. "لكنه ذهب"، قلت. "الم يكن يريد العودة"، قال. "الذهاب". قلت.

Emil's family, it does not justify their subsequent resettlement in Palestine, nor does it validate the myth of Israel—whereby *going* to Palestine is described as a “return.”

That the narrator is able to both empathize with Holocaust survivors while also critiquing the political project that ensues in the name of this traumatic event is the result of and enabled by contextualization. There are incidents when “both victim and perpetrator can claim to be traumatized.”¹⁵⁹ The “danger” occurs with the “de-contextualization” of these traumas, in which “perpetrators . . . claim to be traumatized in order to gain public empathy.”¹⁶⁰

Following the same line of thought, the contextualization of trauma— “go” not “return ”—that occurs in the dialogic exchange between Emil and the narrator—is a critique of the Holocaust's emergence as a “founding trauma.”¹⁶¹ It is also a powerful implication of the Zionist project. It reveals how, in escaping their traumatic past, the Jews (particularly those who supported the Zionist enterprise) inflicted an even bigger trauma on the Palestinians, a trauma that begins with the *Nakbah* and continues during (and beyond) the Lebanese Civil War.

This contextualization of trauma continues with the story of Emil himself, whom we learn served with the Israeli defense army during the 1973 Yom Kippur War. In Gaza, a short encounter with an old Palestinian refugee prompts Emil to quit the Zionist project altogether. The story begins when the Israeli army storms into a Palestinian refugee camp and lines up the camp's male residents for hours under “the August sun.”¹⁶² Hours later, a 70-year-old

¹⁵⁹ Stephan Milich and Lamia Moghnieh, “Trauma: Social Realities and Cultural Texts,” *Meta Journal* 11 (2018):7, <https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2018.11.7941>.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid.

¹⁶¹ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 23.

¹⁶² Khoury, *The Kingdom*, 93.

Palestinian refugee approaches Emil and asks for permission to use the restroom. Emil, aged 20 at the time, permits him to go:

The man got out of line and began walking in that horrible manner. He got down on his knees, put his hands on the ground, and started moving backward, afraid they would shoot him in the back.¹⁶³

In capturing this old man's trauma—"walking in that horrible manner... started moving backward . . . afraid they would shoot him in the back" --Emil contextualizes Palestinian trauma as a by-product of the Zionist enterprise. He immediately follows his contextualization with the following statement: "When you are there you have to choose between the old man and the man carrying the rifle. You can't not choose."

Despite his family's Holocaust experience, Emil does not take comfort in trading his Jewish trauma for an ongoing Palestinian trauma. Instead, he contextualizes the Gazan man's story and problematizes the "denial of other traumas" that followed the institutionalization of the Zionist project. Furthermore, he recognizes his own agency beyond and despite his traumatic experience: "You can't not choose." Emil chooses not to turn the Palestinian into "the Jew's Jew."

Conclusion

In a 2008 article published in *The Nation*, Siddhartha Deb suggests that Khoury's literary writing transpires "as a means of both engagement and withdrawal."¹⁶⁴ It engages in

¹⁶³ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "خرج الرجل من الصف، وبدأ يمشي بتلك الطريقة المخيفة، جثا على ركبتيه، يداه على الأرض، وتحرك إلى الوراء، مخافة أن يطلقوا عليه النار في ظهره."

¹⁶⁴ Siddhartha Deb, "City of Shards: The Novels of Elias Khoury," *The Nation*, November 13, 2008, <https://www.thenation.com/article/city-shards-novels-elias-khoury/>.

the sense that “it looks outward, attempting to grapple with the larger conditions within which it exists” but withdraws as it “retreats indoors . . . trying to create a safe haven for individual and community memories.”¹⁶⁵

Following in Deb’s steps, *The Kingdom of Strangers* emerges as the site of both “engagement” and “withdrawal.” It engages with the Lebanese Civil War and the ensuing state-sponsored amnesia in as much as it creates a safe haven for traumatized strangers to narrate and work through their traumas.

As he tries to come to make sense of his psychic disintegration, our disillusioned narrator opens the text to the collective trauma experienced by the refugees of Beirut’s Shatila camp during the Lebanese Civil War and the ensuing Shatila massacre and War of the Camps. The text follows these traumatized refugees as they narrate their multiple experiences with death and destruction.

By opening up trauma to narrativity, the novella challenges the silence imposed on a major traumatic episode in Palestinian collective memory while also linking the Lebanese Civil War trauma to the 1948 *Nakbah*. In so doing, it ends up implicating both the Lebanese war actors and the Zionist enterprise and exposes them as the political triggers behind this ongoing Palestinian trauma. Finally, the novella establishes that this ongoing trauma was avoidable and that traumatic experiences should not negate one another.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

Gate of the Sun:

Writing and Mediating the *Nakbah* Trauma

Introduction

In this chapter, I discuss Elias Khoury's second Palestinian trauma narrative, his widely celebrated 1998 novel, *Bāb al-shams (Gate of the Sun, 2006)*. I begin by reading the novel as an attempt by Khoury to inscribe a narrative of the 1948 *Nakbah*, long missing due to Israel's control over the Palestinian archive. I suggest that *Gate of the Sun* is directly inspired by Khoury's multi-faceted vocation as literary scholar, researcher and journalist in as much as it is enabled by his decades-long relationship with Lebanon's Palestinian refugee community.

I then move to the novel and trace how Khalil, the main narrator-protagonist and a second-generation Palestinian refugee in Beirut's Shatila camp, suffers a complex trauma in large part inherited from the 1948 generation. I show how in carrying out a narrativization of the 1948 *Nakbah*, Khalil exhibits loyalty to the trauma(s) experienced by first generation Palestinians, while concurrently questioning this generation's problematic fixation on trauma. Using Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory, I trace Khalil's reorganization of Palestinian traumatic memory I trace how Khalil carries out a critical re-enactment of the *Nakbah* and its

legacy, which in turn enables him to tap into and articulate his own repressed trauma as a second-generation Palestinian.

A Silenced *Nakbah*

In a 2012 article titled “Rethinking the Nakba,” Khoury writes that his “personal relationship” with the *Nakbah* began while working on *Gate of the Sun*. He “discovered that the love story” he was after “needed the background of events that took place in northern Palestine in 1948” and “felt that [his] job was to collect memories and write stories never written before.”¹⁶⁶

Gate of the Sun is celebrated as the literary work that “breaks the Palestinian silence by offering the first epic narrative of the 1948 *Nakbah*,” and in so doing, “link[s] the Palestinian traumatic absence to the structural erasures carried out by the settlers.”¹⁶⁷ An English translation by Humphrey Davies came out in 2006 and scooped the Banipal Arabic Literary Translation Prize.¹⁶⁸ In 2004, prominent Egyptian filmmaker Yousry Nasrallah transformed this saga into a four-hour long film, co-scripted by Khoury himself.

Gate of the Sun emerges as yet another novel in which Khoury responds to a major historiographical silence. As is the case in *The Kingdom of Strangers*, a silenced episode in Palestinian traumatic memory motivates this literary undertaking. If Khoury’s anxiety over the post-Lebanese Civil War state-sponsored amnesia and the subsequent erasure of its traumatic memory is what informs *The Kingdom of Strangers*, it is his apprehension about the lack of a

¹⁶⁶ Elias Khoury, “Rethinking the Nakba,” *Critical Inquiry* 38, no. 2 (Winter 2012), 265-266, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/662741>.

¹⁶⁷ Samar H. AlJahdali, “The Land is Mine”: Elias Khoury writes back to Leon Uris,” *Interventions* (2018): 13/6, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2018.1547216>.

¹⁶⁸ “Elias Khoury,” *Banipal: Magazine of Modern Arab Literature*, accessed February 1, 2017, <https://www.banipal.co.uk/contributors/337/elias-khoury/>.

mega narrative of the 1948 *Nakbah* as the *beginning* of an ongoing Palestinian trauma that sits at the core of *Gate of the Sun*.

Khoury's literary response to this historiographical silence is for one a challenge to Israel's long-practiced "repression" of the Palestinian archive.¹⁶⁹ In her earlier mentioned book *Heroes and Martyrs of Palestine: The Politics of National Commemoration*, Laleh Khalili argues that many pre-*Nakbah* archival collections were preserved by Palestinians and deposited in safe places in Lebanon after the *Nakbah* only to be appropriated by Israel during the 1982 Israeli invasion of Lebanon.¹⁷⁰

By writing *Gate of the Sun*, Khoury was also challenging the long-violated Palestinian right to document the *Nakbah*. Attempts to put forth their own stories of the 1948 catastrophe were allegedly made by Lebanon's Palestinian refugee community as early as the 1950s. But as Khalili argues, those attempts "have been challenged, contested, and sometimes silenced."¹⁷¹ She attributes this silencing to a lack of "institutional support," exemplified by how the PLO, particularly during the heyday of the Palestinian national movement in Lebanon, was far from invested in documenting 1948 trauma narratives.¹⁷² Rather, the Palestinian national movement was after "a more homogenous and harmonious history," placing special emphasis on "heroic narratives" as opposed to "bottom-up" histories that threaten to "reveal lines of fissure in the nation, local betrayals by notables, and Palestinian collaboration with the colonizing forces."¹⁷³ Khalili adds that the Lebanese Civil War massacres in Palestinian camps further scattered

¹⁶⁹ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 62.

¹⁷⁰ Diana Allan, "Mythologising Al-Nakba: Narratives, Collective Identity and Cultural Practice among Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," *Oral History* 33, no. 1 (Spring 2005): 51, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40179820>.

¹⁷¹ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 60.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 62.

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*

members of the first Palestinian generation, resulting in a “layering of experienced atrocities” and in turn prolonging the absence of a Palestinian *Nakbah* narrative.¹⁷⁴

Khoury’s work as literary scholar and editor has significantly shaped this master literary project. As researcher, he spent considerable time studying representations of Palestinians in Israeli literature. Throughout this scholarly journey, Khoury identified two literary trends which would shape his own writing in *Gate of the Sun*: “muteness” as a representation of the Palestinian inside the Israeli literary text, and “mirroring” as a tool to challenge and write against this muteness. He argues that the “status of post-1948 Palestinians as Jews of the Jews” was silenced through a “situation of muteness” that transpired in Israeli literature following the institutionalization of the Zionist project in 1948.¹⁷⁵ In the following excerpt of an interview with *Middle East Monitor*, he associates this muteness with Israel’s continued negation of Palestinian traumatic memory:

This difference [between perceptions in both fictions] is a difference of perception. I think that the Israelis are not ready to recognize that the Palestinians exist or to recognize the crimes they committed in 1948. Without recognizing the *nakbah*, without recognizing the suffering of the Palestinians by the Israelis, I think we cannot come to any solution on cultural or political errors.¹⁷⁶

Against this denial of the 1948 trauma comes Khoury’s concept of mirroring to reinscribe *Nakbah* memory into the literary text. Khoury reportedly came across this concept of mirroring while reading S. Yizhar’s 1949 Hebrew novella *Hirbet Hiz’ah*. Yizhar introduced “a play of mirrors” and suggested that Palestinians were now a reflection of the new Israelis. While Yizhar followed in the footsteps of other Israeli writers by portraying the Palestinian as “voiceless,” the novella was nonetheless “a rare demonstration of the ability of literature to

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 61.

¹⁷⁵ Khoury, “Rethinking the Nakba,” 252.

¹⁷⁶ Amelia Smith, “We are not Made of Ink,” *Middle East Monitor*, June 19, 2015, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20150619-we-are-not-made-of-ink/>.

cross the walls of dominant representations.”¹⁷⁷ For his part, Khoury was impressed by Yizhar’s novella and went on to publish an Arabic translation of the text in *Shu’un Filastiniyah* as early as the 1970s, before proceeding to introduce this mirroring concept in his own literature, perhaps most notably in *Gate of the Sun*.¹⁷⁸ Of mirroring as a writing tool, Khoury says:

I tried to create mirrors instead of allegories and metaphors; the allegory pretends to reflect reality, while mirrors reflect other mirrors. My stories were mirrors of stories, and pain mirrored pain.¹⁷⁹

Similarly, Khoury’s decades-long engagement with the Palestinian refugee community of Lebanon enabled the collection of oral narratives which underpin *Gate of the Sun*. As a researcher at Beirut’s Palestine Research Centre in the 1970s, Khoury spent years gathering “personal histories” from refugees who survived the *Nakbah*. He imagined he could be the “Arab Tolstoy” who weaves these histories into narrativity, except that he “never dared write it [the narrative] then” because he “didn’t know how.”¹⁸⁰ Khoury would finally undertake this mega project a decade later, listing as his aim a “rewr[i]t[ing] [of] the *Nakbah* from the point of view of the victims, which was never heard before.”¹⁸¹ Towards that end, he spent seven years conducting research in a number of Palestinian refugee camps across Lebanon.¹⁸² He

¹⁷⁷ Khoury, “Rethinking the Nakba,” 252.

¹⁷⁸ Lital Levy, “Nation, Village, Cave: A Spatial Reading of 1948 in Three Novels of Anton Shammas, Emile Habiby, and Elias Khoury,” *Jewish Social Studies* 18, no. 3, (Spring/Summer 2012): 20, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/510900>.

¹⁷⁹ Khoury, “Rethinking the Nakba,” 266.

¹⁸⁰ Maya Jaggi, “A Circle of Madness,” *The Guardian*, July 28, 2007, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2007/jul/28/fiction.politics>.

¹⁸¹ Jorgen Balzan, “Truth is Always Revolutionary,” *Malta Today*, August 30, 2016, https://www.maltatoday.com.mt/news/interview/69023/truth_is_always_revolutionary_elias_khoury#.XKtnwS2B00p.

¹⁸² Levy, “Nation, Village, Cave,” 19.

would tell his interviewees that he was writing “a story, not a history . . . no tape recorder, no notebooks.”¹⁸³ Khoury then relied on these personal stories to shape his multi-strand narrative.

Gate of the Sun

Yunis, a first-generation Palestinian, lies unconscious in a worn-out hospital in Beirut’s Shatila camp. He is in a coma and caring for him is Khalil Ayyoub, a doctor-turned-nurse working at the same hospital. It is the 1990s and the camp is still healing from the trauma(s) of the Lebanese Civil War. Hoping to wake Yunis up from his coma, Khalil embarks on a storytelling journey in which he recounts to Yunis his story as the latter passed it down to him. As Drew Paul rightfully puts it in his article, “The Grandchildren of Yūnis: Palestinian Protest Camps, Infiltration, and Ilyās Khūrī’s *Bāb al-shams*,” just like “Shahrazad staves off execution by telling elaborate tales to the king,” Khalil “seeks to delay Yunis’s death by retelling his old tales.”¹⁸⁴

Like *The Kingdom of Strangers*, the text is structured as a stream-of-consciousness narration except that Khalil alternates between first, second and third-person narration throughout. Here again, a “mise-en-abîme structure held together by the frame story” unfolds and Khalil’s recollections of Yunis’ life introduce a myriad of stories; a narrativization of collective trauma as experienced by the Palestinian peasants of the Galilee.¹⁸⁵ The narrative follows Galilean peasants as they are expelled from their villages and rushed from one Palestinian village to the other before winding up as refugees in Lebanon. In so doing, it

¹⁸³ Jeremy Harding, “Jeremy Harding goes to Beirut to Meet the Novelist Elias Khoury,” *London Review of Books*, November 16, 2006, <https://www.lrb.co.uk/v28/n22/jeremy-harding/jeremy-harding-goes-to-beirut-to-meet-the-novelist-elias-khoury>.

¹⁸⁴ Drew Paul, “The Grandchildren of Yūnis: Palestinian Protest Camps, Infiltration, and Ilyās Khūrī’s *Bāb al-shams*,” *Journal of Arabic Literature* 48 (2017): 183, <https://doi.org/10.1163/1570064x-12341345>.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 183.

captures the nuances of the complex trauma that emerges in their lives and reveals how they grappled with their cataclysmic traumas following the *Nakbah*. Many of these stories are repeated across the narrative and in many cases told from different viewpoints, as such casting doubt on the reliability of memory. As the narrative unfolds, these retellings are juxtaposed with Khalil's own story as a second-generation Palestinian refugee. The novel therefore emerges as a repository of two traumatic histories: that of the *Nakbah* as experienced by the 1948 generation, as well as the Lebanese Civil War trauma(s) as experienced by second generation Palestinians.

The narrative is centered on the characters of Yunis and Khalil. Yunis is a peasant-turned-freedom fighter. His activism begins as early as the 1930s, precisely during the 1936-1939 Arab Revolt in Palestine, and continues with and beyond the 1948 Arab-Israeli War. Yunis responds to the loss of Palestine by becoming a *fidā'i*. He lives between military bases, sometimes infiltrating into his lost village where his family still lives. Occasionally, he spends nights in a cave lying in close proximity to his lost Galilean village, where he indulges in sexual encounters with his wife, Nahilah.

For his part, Khalil is a child when the *Nakbah* happens and goes through the pain of refugeedom which is exacerbated with his family's subsequent resettlement in Shatila camp. He suffers a triple loss: his father is killed in 1959 by Lebanese forces, his sister dies, and his traumatized mother flees to Jordan. All three traumas create a significant rupture in Khalil's experience of the world. He begins his life as a freedom fighter (at the age of nine), but an injury sustained during the Lebanese Civil War abruptly ends his *fidā'i* enterprise, after which he embarks on a career shift to medicine. He assumes the position of doctor at the Galilee Hospital in Shatila and there emerges as first-hand witness of the Shatila massacre and the subsequent War of the Camps.

Other characters include Umm Hassan, whose death opens the narrative, a mother figure for the children of the camp and a major source of the 1948 trauma narratives that unfold in the text. There is also Yunis' wife, Nahilah, who remains in their fallen Palestinian village and witnesses its brutal transformation into an Israeli space. She raises her children, Yunis' kids, which they conceive on their nights in the cave, and also looks after Yunis' parents. Of the second-generation Palestinian characters in the text, there is Shams, Khalil's semi-lover, herself a victim of a traumatic marriage; and Noha, a camp-resident who grows increasingly dissatisfied with camp life and eventually migrates to Europe.

Gate of the Sun has received much scholarly attention. In her article "'The Land is Mine': Elias Khoury writes back to Leon Uris," Samar AlJahdali suggests that the novel is an example of "history from below."¹⁸⁶ The novel, she adds, is "an instance of "'writing back,' [and] narrating the unspoken and replacing the monologism of the official line with the multiplicity of oral history."¹⁸⁷ This reading of the novel is shared by Fabio Caiani in his article "'My Name is Yālū'. The Development of Metafiction in Ilyās Khūrī's Work." Caiani argues that *Gate of the Sun* epitomizes the "two main driving forces" which inform Khoury's fiction; the first being on the "marginalization of history, the victims of war, those who have no voice," and the other "on the way we tell stories, create history, write fiction."¹⁸⁸

Khoury's bias towards the marginalized is echoed in Amos Goldberg's article "Narrative, Testimony, and Trauma." She reads the novel as the site of a "destabilizing, traumatized and decentered testimony of the Palestinian victim– witness and the essential, collective Palestinian national epos that frames these individual traumatized narratives."¹⁸⁹

¹⁸⁶ AlJahdali, "The Land is Mine," 5.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 7.

¹⁸⁸ Fabio Caiani, "'My Name is Yālū,' The Development of Metafiction in Ilyās Khūrī's Work," *Middle Eastern Literatures* 10, no. 2 (2007): 141, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14752620701437523>.

¹⁸⁹ Amos Goldberg, "Narrative, Testimony, and Trauma," *Interventions* 18, no. 3, (2016): 335, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369801X.2015.1042396>.

Goldberg applauds how Khoury challenges the peripheralization of refugees by bringing them back to “the center,” thus “approaching the Palestinian national story from an a priori deconstructionist position.”¹⁹⁰ The novel, he adds, “strives for a new post-traumatic, destabilized and fragmented Palestinian national narrative that would replace the traditional, ossified, heroic one, and would work through the trauma.”¹⁹¹

Yunis’ cave is the focus of a paper by Lital Levy titled “Nation, Village, Cave: A Spatial Reading of 1948 in Three Novels of Anton Shammas, Emile Habiby, and Elias Khoury.” Levy recognizes *Gate of the Sun* as one of three novels that “subvert the dominant representation of space in Israeli literature” by “mapping the post-[*Nakbah*] Palestinian experience onto pre-[*Nakbah*] space and time.”¹⁹² In another study of the novel titled “Deliberating the Holocaust and the *Nakba*: disruptive empathy and binationalism in Israel/Palestine,” Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg focus on Khoury’s accommodation of Jewish traumatic memory in the text, praising how he “bring[s] the memories of the Holocaust and the *Nakba* together in a fashion that disrupts the dominant, antagonistic and exclusionary Israeli and Palestinian national narratives.”¹⁹³

It is Drew Paul who gives attention to the rather understudied intergenerational conflict at the heart of *Gate of the Sun*. He argues that the novel gestures to the “transition from first-hand to second-hand narrative.”¹⁹⁴ This is manifested by how Khalil, a second generation Palestinian, engages in postmemorial work, a practice which “opens up creative possibilities” while concurrently emerging as “a mournful mode of relating to the past.”¹⁹⁵ He asserts that

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 337.

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 337.

¹⁹² Levy, “Nation, Village, Cave,” 11.

¹⁹³ Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg, “Deliberating the Holocaust and the *Nakba*: Disruptive Empathy and Binationalism in Israel/Palestine,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 16, no.1 (2014): 77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2014.878114>.

¹⁹⁴ Paul, “The Grandchildren of Yūnis,” 180.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 184-185.

these “creative possibilities” eventually allow Khalil to construct “a mode of inhabiting the present and constructing a future of forgettings and memories.”¹⁹⁶

Narrating Trauma as Postmemorial Remembrance

As *Gate of the Sun* opens, we are in the Galilee Hospital in Lebanon’s Shatila camp. Khalil grapples with a triple tragedy: the death of Umm Hassan, a mother figure for Khalil; the fast-approaching death of Yunis, the camp’s former hero and a father figure for Khalil, and perhaps most distressingly, the murder of Khalil’s lover, Shams, whose death, Khalil believes, contains a “riddle” that will only be “solved” after the “emotional shock has passed.”¹⁹⁷

We learn that Khalil has spent the past three months by Yunis’ side telling him stories of his past life. We also learn that he is on the run from Shams’ family who are adamant on taking revenge on their late daughter’s past-lovers. Overcome by fear, Khalil takes the hospital as his hiding place. Here, we come across the breach in one’s experience of the world, a breach that exceeds Khalil’s ability to grasp it. This looming death devastates him to the extent that it skips his consciousness: “I’m lost. I’m lost and I’m afraid and I’m in despair and I’m wavering and I’m fidgety and I’ve remembered, and I’ve forgotten.”¹⁹⁸

Khalil’s sense of loss, fear and despair coupled with his mixed-up memory are all indications of this rupture. What this atmosphere of death does is reactivate Khalil’s older traumas, which are hinted at in the opening pages of the novel: the murder of his father when Khalil was only a child, followed by the death of his only sister and the flight of his traumatized

¹⁹⁶ Ibid., 188.

¹⁹⁷ Elias Khoury, *Gate of the Sun*, trans. Humphrey Davies (Brooklyn, NY: Archipelago Books; St. Paul, MN: 2005), 115. The text in Arabic: "وأنا متأكد أن موتها يخفي لغزا يجب حله. والألغاز لا تكتشف إلا بعد زوال الصدمة العاطفية."

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 16. The text in Arabic: "والله ضعت. ضعت وخفت وتذكرت ونسيت."

mother, in addition to his own setbacks as defeated freedom fighter, semi-doctor, and duped lover.

These new traumas stimulate Khalil's older wounds, thereby attesting to what trauma theorists Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onnon Van Der Hart say of this activation as constituting an "automatic" response which occurs "in situations which are reminiscent of the original traumatic situation."¹⁹⁹ Khalil alludes to the activation of his older traumas when he says:

I want you to know before you die that this protracted death of yours has turned out life upside down. Did you have to sink into this death for your memory, and mine, and everyone else's, to explode? You've been stricken with a brainstorm, and I'm stricken with a storm of memories.²⁰⁰

Overcome by this new rupture and its subsequent stimulation of a "storm of memories," Khalil announces his narrative intention as follows: "How am I to bear the death of Shams and my fear, if not through telling stories?"²⁰¹ These stories, Khalil tells us, will in large part comprise 1948 traumas that were passed down to him:

I know you're sick of my stories, so I'm going to tell you your own. I'll return to you what you've given me."²⁰²

The text becomes the place in which Khalil, as victim-witness, stages his attempt to comprehend the aforementioned shattering experience(s) and to work through them. As he tries to grasp the nuances of his trauma, he gives other Palestinians the space to narrate their own traumas within the text.

¹⁹⁹ Bessel A. Van Der Kolk and Onnon Van Der Hart, "The Intrusive Past: The Flexibility of Memory and the Engraving of Trauma," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 163.

²⁰⁰ Khoury, *Gate*, 212. The text in Arabic: "لكن قبل أن تموت أريد أن أقول لك، إن موتك البطيء هذا خلخل حياتنا. هل كان يجب أن تسقط في هذا الموت كي تنفجر ذاكرتك وذاكرتي وذاكرة كل الناس؟ أنت مصاب بانفجار الدماغ، وأنا مصاب بانفجار الذاكرة."

²⁰¹ Ibid., 138. The text in Arabic: "كيف أستطيع احتمال موت شمس وخوفي من شبحها لولا الحكاية؟"

²⁰² Ibid., 16. The text in Arabic: "أعرف أنك زهقت من حكاياتي، فأنا أخبرك حكاياتك، أعيد لك ما أخذته منك."

Unlike the narrator-protagonist of *The Kingdom of Strangers* who is only concerned with working through his Lebanese Civil War trauma, Khalil's task is bound to be more complicated. He is trying to capture the nuances of his own defeats all the while grappling with the enormity of his inherited trauma. The 1948 traumatic legacy is doing more than just complicate his task of realizing his present trauma. It is blocking his ability to work it through:

Memory is the process of organizing what to forget, and what we're doing now, you and me, is organizing our forgetting . . . But don't you dare die now! You have to finish organizing your forgetting first, so that I can remember afterwards!²⁰³

The novel, the entirety of which unfolds inside the hospital room, therefore emerges as the place from which Khalil weaves his reenactments and organizes his aspired forgetfulness.

Khalil emerges as a son of postmemory who, following Hirsch's earlier quoted definition of postmemory, relies on a range of "stories, images, and behaviors" to carry out postmemorial work and mediate his inherited traumatic memory.²⁰⁴ According to Hirsch, this postmemorial work is especially important in cases where an archive of the first generation has been lost due to "traumatic interruption, exile, and diaspora."²⁰⁵ As they engage in postmemorial activity, children of postmemory experiment with ways to preserve the memory of these inherited traumas without "risk[ing] having one's own stories and experiences displaced, even evacuated, by those of a previous generation."²⁰⁶

²⁰³ Ibid., 163.

²⁰⁴ Hirsch, "The Generation," 106-107

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 111.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 107.

To circumvent this risk, they try to mediate this inherited memory by bringing in their own current experiences as the post memory generation. In the Palestinian context, this is what Amir Khadem describes as the problem of memory vs. memoricide. In his reading of *Gate of the Sun* titled “The Permanence of an Ephemeral Pain: Dialectics of Remembrance in Two Novels of the Israel-Palestine Conflict,” Khadem writes of how second-generation Palestinians are preoccupied with the inscription of past memories, while concurrently trying to transcend the “pain” inherited and associated with these memories. The first commitment “obliges an active remembrance” while the second calls for “a selective forgetting.”²⁰⁷

Guided by Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, I read Khalil’s narrativization of the 1948 traumatic memory as itself constituting postmemorial work: He uses the resources that were passed down to him, predominantly oral narratives, to understand and narrativize the inherited trauma. As son of postmemory, he tries to create coherence out of these fragmented stories:

Piecing the glimpses together, I turned it into a story . . . It fell to me to collect your asides and mutterings and work them in a story to tell you.”²⁰⁸

As he ties up the loose ends, Khalil complains that they are suffocating his ability to speak:

I stop and then the words come. They come like sweat oozing from my pores, and rather than hearing my voice, I hear yours coming out of my throat.”²⁰⁹

To reclaim his speech ability, he decides to mediate the *Nakbah* memory as represented by Yunis:

²⁰⁷ Amir Khadem, “The Permanence of an Ephemeral Pain: Dialectics of Remembrance in Two Novels of the Israel-Palestine Conflict,” *The Comparatist* 39 (October 2015): 281, <https://doi.org/10.1353/com.2015.0020>.

²⁰⁸ Khoury, *Gate*, 32. The text in Arabic: "أنا جمعت الحكاية ورتبت جملك المشتتة وصارت حكاية."

²⁰⁹ Ibid., 16. The text in Arabic: "اسكت فتأتي الكلمات. تأتي كعرق يرشح من مسامي، وبدل أن أسمع صوتي، أسمع صوتك يخرج من حنجرتي."

Once upon a time, a long time ago, there was—or there wasn’t—a young man called Yunis.²¹⁰

No longer gripped by the heroism of Yunis’ generation, Khalil’s “there was” or “there wasn’t” signals his readiness to decenter this generation’s stories and subsequently claim his own trauma. To do so, he must practice the postmemorial remembrances that can allow him to claim his own trauma. As such, he addresses Yunis saying: “Go, die with them, as Umm Hassan suggested, and set me free.”²¹¹

The next section looks at the first component of Khalil’s postmemorial remembrance as he conceives his way to freedom, namely his narrativization of the 1948 trauma of the *Nakbah* as passed down to him by Yunis and other first-generation Palestinians.

Narrating the *Nakbah*’s Trauma

In those days, Son, we left everything. We left the dead unburied and fled.²¹²

.....

In those days, Galilee quaked with fear—houses demolished, people lost, villages abandoned and everything in shambles.²¹³

.....

Everyone walked on their “last journey,” as the people of the villages of Galilee referred to their collective exodus to Lebanon. But it wasn’t their last journey. In fact, it was the start of wanderings in the wilderness whose end only God knows.²¹⁴

As he starts working through his trauma, Khalil pieces together stories of the 1948 *Nakbah* and gives traumatized individuals the space to narrate their own traumas. It is the

²¹⁰ Ibid., 30. The text in Arabic: "كان أو ما كان في قديم الزمان، وسالف العصر والأوان، كان فتى اسمه يونس."

²¹¹ Ibid., 23. "أذهب ومت عندهم كما اقترحت أم حسن، وخلصني."

²¹² Ibid., 65. The text in Arabic: "في تلك الأيام، يا ابني، تركنا كل شيء، تركنا الموتى في العراء وانهزمنا."

²¹³ Ibid., 64. The text in Arabic: "في تلك الأيام كان الجليل يرتجف خوفاً: بيوت مهدمة، بشر تائهون، قرى مهجورة، وكل شيء اختلط بكل شيء."

²¹⁴ Ibid., 24. The text in Arabic: "ومشى الجميع في رحلتهم الأخيرة. هكذا أسمى أهالي قرى الجليل هجرتهم الجماعية إلى لبنان. لكنها لم تكن رحلتهم الأخيرة، بل كانت بداية رحلات تيه لا يعلم إلا الله كيف ستنتهي."

aforementioned “last journey” as experienced by panic-stricken Palestinians upon their 1948 expulsion that reverberates throughout his account. The “last” here is intentionally misplaced, as the text details how the Palestinians’ expulsion from their Galilean villages signaled the beginning of what still is an ongoing journey.

The text amply recounts how, on the eve of the *Nakbah*, the Israeli army scared off unarmed Palestinian peasants from one village to the other, until they wound up in southern Lebanon before making their way to the camps which were to become their temporary homes. As the narrative progresses, we are given a detailed documentation of the “collapse” of the Galilee.²¹⁵ Of the 450 villages that were reportedly demolished on the eve of the *Nakbah*, the stories of the following villages are meticulously laid out: Kaswan, al-Mukur, al-Jdeideh, Abu Sinan, Kafar Yasif, al-Kweikat, Nazareth, Ma’loul, Saffouri, Kabri, Tarshiha, al-Birwa and Sha’ab.²¹⁶

Laleh Khalili argues that upon their arrival in Beirut, Palestinian peasants-turned-refugees experienced the “simultaneous, radical and traumatic processes of urbanization, proletarianization and loss of whatever political rights they may have held in Palestine.”²¹⁷ This trauma, Nadia Latif claims in her article “*Fallahin, Fida’iyyin, Laji’in*: Palestinian Camp Refugees in Lebanon as Autochthons,” was not merely a result of having lost their peasant identity, but was also in large part triggered by the loss of “the social relations kin/neighbor/patron/client—engendered by this particular manner of sustaining and reproducing life.”²¹⁸

²¹⁵ Ibid., 192.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Khalili, *Heroes and Martyrs*, 45.

²¹⁸ Nadia Latif, “*Fallahin, Fida’iyyin, Laji’in*: Palestinian Camp Refugees in Lebanon as Autochthons,” *The Arab Studies Journal* 19, no. 1 (Spring 2011), 47, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/23265811>.

Following Khalili and Latif, I argue that *Gate of the Sun* details the peasant-turned-refugee trauma as experienced by Palestinians of the Galilee. This is evident when, in total denial of the post-May 1948 reality on the ground, an old Palestinian woman insists on sneaking into her fallen village to harvest her crops. Upon getting caught by an Israeli officer, she starts yelling at him:

We're just peasants . . . We don't have a leader, we're just peasants who want to harvest our crop and go back to our houses. Would you rather we died of hunger?²¹⁹

This fractured identity and the ensuing traumatization of “forced urbanization” in the camps of Beirut characterizes how post-1948 refugee life is represented in *Gate of the Sun*. The text is ample with stories of peasants who struggle to comprehend the reality of the *Nakbah* and sneak back into their villages to water, harvest or simply check their crops. In one instance in the novel, a group of Palestinian peasants are encouraged by the village priest to infiltrate back into their fallen village and: “harvest the wheat before they [the Zionists] came back” to which they happily correspond: “and *we agreed*” (My italics).²²⁰

Another place in the text where this trauma of *fallah-turned-laji* is especially evident is in the story of Noha's grandmother, Khadijeh. Khadijeh smuggles into her village of al-Birwa years after the *Nakbah*. Upon her arrival, she engages in a heated confrontation with the Israeli Jews who have taken over her house. She is dumbfounded to see that the new owners have cut down her cherished trees, themselves a major signifier of pre-1948 Palestinian village life. She expresses her outrage by saying:

²¹⁹ Khoury, *Gate*, 199. The text in Arabic: "نحن مجرد فلاحين...نحن لا قائد لنا، مجرد فلاحين نريد حصد محصولنا والعودة إلى بيوتنا، هل تريدون لنا الموت جوعاً؟"

²²⁰ Ibid., 197. The text in Arabic: "اقترح الكاهن أن نحصد القمح قبل عودتهم، ووافقناه."

I told them these were Roman olive trees. How could anyone dare cut down Christ's olive trees? These were Father Jebran's olive trees.²²¹

Nowhere is the loss of peasant identity, this trauma of *fallah*-turned-*laji*, more palpable than in the story of Yunis. The rupture that occurs in his experience of the world is evident in the following excerpt, in which Khalil reminds Yunis of one of his earlier re-enactments of the *Nakbah*:

You said you understood the meaning of the word *country* after the fall of Sha'ab. A country isn't oranges or olives, or the mosque of al-Jazzar in Acre. A country is falling into the abyss, feeling that you are part of the whole, and dying because it has died. In those villages running down to the sea from northern Galilee to the west, no one thought of what it would mean for everything to fall. The villages fell, and we ran from one to another as though we were on the sea jumping from one boat to another, the boats sinking, and us with them. No one was able to conceive of what the fall would mean, and the people fell because everything fell.²²²

Notice the stress on "death" and "fall" of Palestinian peasants as figurative reverberations of the death and fall of Galilean villages. Together they capture the subtleties of the shattering trauma experienced by Yunis and other peasants, so that post-*Nakbah* life becomes a long episode of "boats sinking, and us with them." This breach, Khalil reminds Yunis, left the latter in a state of half-life half-death:

Everything got tangled up, and you spent the years after this great disaster, the *Nakbah*, trying to draw a line between the dead and the living.²²³

As *fallahin*-turned-*laji*'in, the refugees of *Gate of the Sun* suffer a range of post-trauma symptoms which are preceded by a period of silence, or what Kolk and Hart describe as

²²¹ Ibid, 208. The text in Arabic: "قلت لهم هذا زيتون روماني، هل يجرؤ أحد على قطع زيتون المسيح، هذا زيتون الأبونا جبران."

²²² Ibid., 193. The text in Arabic: "قلت إنك بعد سقوط شعب فهمت كلمة وطن. فالوطن ليس البرتقال ولا الزيتون. ولا جامع. ففي تلك القرى المنحدرة إلى البحر، من شمالي الجليل إلى غربه، لم يتصور أحد معنى سقوط كل شيء. كانت القرى تتساقط، وكنا نركض من قرية إلى قرية كأننا في البحر. نقفز من زورق إلى زورق، و الزوارق تغرق ونحن نغرق. لم يكن أحد قادرا على تصور معنى السقوط، وسقط الناس، لأن كل شيء سقط."

²²³ Ibid., 178. The text in Arabic: "اختلطت الأمور عليكم، وقضيت سنوات نكبتيكم الأولى، وأنتم تحاولون رسم الخط الفاصل بين الموتى والأحياء."

“speechless terror.”²²⁴ Overwhelmed by the magnitude of these events, they are unable to give their traumatic experience any linguistic meaning and seek comfort in the absence of speech instead.

There is the story of an elderly Palestinian woman who infiltrates into her fallen village of al-Birwa and sits on the ruins of her house, accompanied only by her “stubborn silence.”²²⁵ There is also the trauma-induced silence that befalls Yunis’ father, the blind sheikh of Ain-al Zaitoun, following the fall of his village. The incomprehensible loss deprives him of his ability to speak:

Everyone thought it would be like the war tales of their ancestors, where mighty armies were defeated . . . The blind sheikh told his wife that words had lost their meaning, so he decided to be silent.²²⁶

As they slowly transcend their silence, Palestinian peasants develop what Khalil describes as “Return Fever,” whereby peasants who could no longer bear staying away from their lands strategized acts of infiltration into what was now Israel. This eagerness to return is echoed in the following quote by a Galilean peasant:

But I couldn’t agree to live in Kafar Yasif; I wanted al-Birwa. I said we should go back and live with the people of al-Birwa that were left, go back and cultivate our own land. What were we supposed to do for work in Kafar Yasif?²²⁷

Furthermore, the loss of peasant identity is exacerbated by the fact that life in the camp becomes a daily reminder of this loss. At one point in the text, Khalil remembers how his

²²⁴ Kolk and Hart, “The Intrusive Past,” 172.

²²⁵ Khoury, *Gate*, 207. The text in Arabic: "وهي لا ترد."

²²⁶ Ibid., 80-81. The text in Arabic: "كان الناس يعتقدون أن الحرب تشبه الحروب التي سمعوا حكاياتها من آبائهم، عن جيوش جرارة تنهزم... الشيخ الأعمى، قال لزوجته إن الكلام فقد معناه، لذلك قرر أن يصمت."

²²⁷ Ibid., 204-205. The text in Arabic: "وأنا.. لم أوافق على العيش في كفر ياسيف، أردت البروة، قلت نعود ونسكن مع من بقي من أهلها، نرجع ونزرع أرضنا، ماذا سنشتغل في كفر ياسيف."

grandmother Shahineh “said the agony started in the camp.”²²⁸ He recalls her description of the temporary camp that was set up in al-Rashidiyyeh:

The only shelter people could find was under big, dry banana leaves. They’d buy ten leaves for five Lebanese piasters and make roofs for their tents and spread the leaves on the ground.²²⁹

The camp reminds Shahineh that she is no longer a peasant, that she has lost her land, and perhaps most traumatizingly, that she must now make peace with “dry banana leaves” as her new home parameters.

Unable to accept their traumatic loss, Palestinian peasants resort to the reproduction of their lost villages in their Lebanon camps, and in so doing attest to Nadia Latif’s argument that first generation Palestinians replicated “the social order of village life . . . along with the form of community bound up with it” inside the camps.²³⁰ The Galilee is grafted onto the camp space so that Shatila’s only hospital, which forms the setting for this novel, is named “The Galilee Hospital.” For its part, the camp is so detached from the rest of Beirut that Umm Hassan feels it normal to announce that: “I don’t live in Beirut, I live in the camp. The camp? It’s a grouping of villages piled up one on top of another.”²³¹

As they reproduce Palestine inside the camp space, these peasants hold on to signifiers of their lost village life. This is manifest in how Khalil’s grandmother stuffs her pillow with flowers that remind her of her lost Galilean village, al-Ghabsiyyeh and which she keeps all her life. Of this nostalgic reproduction of Palestine, Khalil says:

²²⁸ Ibid., 354. The text in Arabic: "قالت جنتي إن العذاب بدأ في المخيم."

²²⁹ Khoury, *Gate*, 355. The text in Arabic: "لم يجد الناس ملجأهم سوى في أوراق الموز الكبيرة الناشفة. كانوا يشترون عشر ورقات موز بخمسة قروش لبنانية، يسقفون بها خيامهم، ويمدونها على الأرض."

²³⁰ Latif, "Fallahin," 48.

²³¹ Khoury, *Gate*, 112. The text in Arabic: "بس أنا لا أعيش في بيروت، أعيش في المخيم، والمخيم مجموعة قرى مكدسة فوق بعضها بعضا."

I was convinced then—I still am—that my grandmother was afflicted with floral dementia, a widespread condition among Palestinian peasants who were driven from their villages.²³²

Perhaps the most novel response to the 1948 trauma comes in the form of a cave, the so-called “Cave of the Sun,” which Yunis builds in close proximity to his lost Galilee. He digs it out near his old village of Deir al-Asad and it becomes the site of his short reunions with Nahilah. Yunis introduces his cave-as-abode saying: “I founded a village in a place no one knows, a village in the rocks where the sun enters and sleeps.”²³³ He conceived of the idea as early as 1948 when he was part of the then-budding nationalist movement. He met with his comrades and proposed the following scheme:

I proposed, ‘Come on, let’s look for caves in Galilee and bring back the refugees. A cave is better than a tent, or a house of corrugated iron, or banana leaf walls but they didn’t agree. Members of the Organization said it was a pipe dream. An entire people can’t live in caves. They told me to go look for caves for the fedayeen and I saw the sarcasm in their expressions, so I didn’t look. I arranged my cave for myself and by myself and lived in it.’²³⁴

Lital Levy reads Yunis’ cave project as a reproduction of “village inside a cave” and translates it as a “rejects[ion] [of] the terms of refugee life in favor of a self-made “reality” of his [Yunis’] own.”²³⁵ The cave, she argues, “becomes his own means of return, his own private Palestine” and as such emerges as an “underground homeland.”²³⁶ While I agree with Levy’s reading, I would like to take this argument further and suggest that the building of the cave constitutes a post-trauma symptom. It is a temporary denial of the post-1948 reality. By

²³² Ibid., 38. The text in Arabic: وهو مرض شائع عند الفلاحين الفلسطينيين "وكننت مقتنعا وما أزال بأن جدتي أصيبت بخرف الأزهار. والذين طردوا من قراهم."

²³³ Khoury, *Gate*, 20. "أما أنا فأسست قرية لا يعرف أحد مكانها. قرية في الصخور تدخلها الشمس وتنام فيها."

²³⁴ Ibid., 388-389. The text in Arabic: "أنا اقترحت عليهم، قلت لهم تعالوا نبحث عن المغاور في الجليل، ونطلب إلى اللاجئين العودة إليها، المغارة أفضل من الخيمة، أو من بيت الزنكو أو من حيطان أوراق الموز، لكنهم لم يوافقوا. قالوا في التنظيم أن هذا وهم، الشعب لا يعيش في المغاور، وكلفوني البحث عن مغاور للفدائيين، ورأيت في وجوههم السخرية من مغارتي، لذلك لم أبحث، صنعت مغارتي بنفسي ولنفسي، وعشت فيها."

²³⁵ Lital Levy, "Nation, Village, Cave," 20.

²³⁶ Ibid., 21-22.

allegorizing Palestine, Yunis rejects his *fallah*-turned-*laji*' reality and tries to ease the magnitude of the overwhelming rupture he experiences during the *Nakbah*.

In putting together these re-enactments of the *Nakbah* and its associated trauma, Khalil, as Samar AlJahdali argues, "insists on the articulation of memories, since they are the only archives available to post-1948 generations."²³⁷ We see how in passing down their *Nakbah* stories to Adam, those peasants are able to move from a traumatic to narrative memory, in which they narrativize traumatic moments of the past while concurrently realizing that they are in the present.

By fleshing out the trauma, Khalil exhibits loyalty to this "only archive" in as much as he contextualizes "the historicity of the trauma and the continuity of its consequences."²³⁸ Furthermore, this narrativization of the 1948 *Nakbah* as experienced by Galilean peasants directly implicates the political stressors behind the trauma: it was the 1948 *Nakbah* as a man-made disaster that initiated the traumatic neurosis that transpired in these peasants' lives. What's more, the continuity of the *Nakbah*, manifested by these peasants' ongoing refugee status, suggests that the trauma is no longer an event-based experience, but rather a structural trauma that defines their current experience of living.

In the next section, I look at the second part of Khalil's postmemorial narrativity and trace how he complicates and problematizes the 1948 trauma narratives.

Mediating Trauma Narratives

In her article "Mythologising Al-Nakba[h]: Narratives, Collective Identity and Cultural Practice among Palestinian Refugees in Lebanon," Diana Allan traces how 1948 narratives

²³⁷ AlJahdali, "The Land is Mine," 13.

²³⁸ Ibid.

play a role in “the production of national belonging” in Shatila camp and observes how second-generation camp residents mediate their inherited *Nakbah* memory. In a conversation with a Shatila resident about the *Nakbah* and the Palestinian right to return, the resident proclaims: “*khara al awda—biddna na’eesh* (‘shit to the right of return—we want to live!’).” Allan reads the resident’s scornful comment as constitutive of a break with the “nationalist code” in which the refugee “replac[es] the authenticity of the nostalgic gaze with a plea to be allowed to live in the present” and goes on to translate it “as the abandonment of political subjectivity and national cause.”²³⁹ Together, these comments encourage Allan to assert that “the ‘oral narrative tradition’ has become the empty signifier” in today’s Shatila camp, manifest in how the “duty to remember” has left second generation Palestinians with a “growing sense of alienation.”²⁴⁰ She concludes that these inherited traumas are “eclipsing their own experiences of crisis in Lebanon and their present suffering.”²⁴¹

Khalil shares with the aforementioned Shatila residents this “growing sense of alienation” which overshadows his own identity as a second-generation Palestinian. He stages his own “shit to the right to return, we want to live!” by scorning his late grandmother’s stuffed pillow which she carried around all her life. Swollen with flowers that reminded her of Palestine, the pillow was the late peasant’s allegory of her lost village. She passes it on to Khalil shortly before her death. For his part, Khalil vows to un-claim this act of inheritance. His tactic is to “kill” Yunis with the pillow then “get rid of that pillow of flowers that reeks of *decay*” (My italics).²⁴² I translate Khalil’s wish to suffocate Yunis with the pillow then toss it away as a foreshadowing of the unmaking of Palestinian trauma narratives which he embarks on in the text.

²³⁹ Diana Allan, “Mythologising Al-Nakba,” 54.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 55.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 53.

²⁴² Khoury, *Gate*, 38. The text in Arabic: “لأنني أردت قتلك بمخدة...يجب أن أرمي مخدة الأزهار المليئة برائحة العفونة.”

In the rest of this section, I trace how Khalil problematizes 1948 trauma narratives by:

1) Critiquing the homogenization of 1948 narratives and how they idealize heroism and martyrdom, 2) Quizzing the first generation's fixation on past traumas, 3) And finally, questioning how the Palestinian narrative of 1948 ignores and refuses to engage with Jewish traumatic memory.

The Unmaking of Heroes and Heroism

You don't want to hear about anything except heroism, and you think you're the *heroes' hero*.²⁴³

Khalil begins by unmaking Yunis' legacy as a heroic resistance fighter. He reveals that Yunis constantly denied his own personal defeats by euphemizing them:

You use words to play tricks with the truth. That's the game that you play with your memories—you play tricks and say what you want without naming it.²⁴⁴

He ponders how Yunis would euphemize his own slippage into a coma:

Yunes wasn't afraid, his heart never wavered. Yunis "withdrew" because he was a hero."²⁴⁵

Khalil deconstructs Yunis' story by revealing the flip side of the latter's celebrated heroism: how he abandoned his own family in the fifties to set up training camps for the freedom fighters in Lebanon, and disappeared for decades after the *Nakbah*, only to return intermittently, thus allocating to Nahilah the whole responsibility of raising up their family.

²⁴³ Ibid., 221. The text in Arabic: "أنت لا تريد سماع أي شيء غير البطولة. وتعتقد نفسك "أبطال" الأبطال."

²⁴⁴ Ibid., 68-69. The text in Arabic: "لأنك تتحايل على الحقيقة بالكلمات. هذه هي لعبتك مع الذكريات، تتحايل وتقول ما تريده دون أن تسميه."

²⁴⁵ Ibid., 72. The text in Arabic: "يونس لم يخف أو يرتجف قلبه. يونس انسحب لأنه بطل."

Khalil confronts Yunis with this reality: “She lived her life alone among the blind, the refugees, and the dead. Then you’d turn up at *Bab al-Shams*, place grapes beneath her feet and go away again, leaving her sad, abandoned, and pregnant.”²⁴⁶ He portrays Yunis as an *absent* son, husband and father:

You left as men always do. Manliness, or what we call manliness, consists of flight, because inside all the bluster and bullying and big words, there’s a refusal to face up to life.²⁴⁷

In her article, “Commemorating Battles and Massacres in the Palestinian Refugee Camps of Lebanon,” Laleh Khalili defines the glorification of martyrdom as “the process by which lived experience is decontextualized, shorn of its concrete details, and transformed into an abstract symbol that can then be instrumentalized as a mobilizing tool by being filled with necessary ideological rhetoric and explanations.”²⁴⁸ Following Khalili’s definition, I argue that Khalil *re-contextualizes* his lived experience by questioning the over-glorification and romanticization of martyrdom as practiced by first-generation Palestinians. He expresses his growing disillusionment with this practice when he says:

I didn’t bring the map of Palestine or the posters of martyrs. Nothing. Those don’t mean a thing here. Do you remember how we used to tremble in front of these posters . . . ? Those posters were an integral part of our life, and we filled the walls of the camp and the city with them, dreaming that one day our own pictures would appear on similar ones. All of us dreamed of seeing our faces outlined in bright red and with the martyr’s halo.²⁴⁹

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 135. The text in Arabic: تضع "عاشت المرأة وحيدة بين العميان واللاجئين والموتى. ثم تأتي أنت إلى مغارة باب الشمس، تضع العنب تحت رجليها، وتغادر، تاركاً زوجتك وحيدة وحزينة ومهجورة وحبلية."

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 61. The text in Arabic: "هربت كما يهرب جميع الرجال. الرجولة أو ما نسميه رجولة هي الهرب. فداخل الهويرة والتشبيح والكلام الكبير، هناك الهرب من مواجهة الحياة."

²⁴⁸ Khalili, "Commemorating Battles," 1565-1566.

²⁴⁹ Khoury, *Gate*, 130. The text in Arabic: "لم أ جلب خارطة فلسطين، ولا ملصقات الشهداء ولا شيء، إذ لم يعد لهذه الأشياء أي معنى الآن. هل تذكر كيف كنا نرتجف أمام ملصقات الشهداء، ونشعر أن الشهيد سوف يمزق الورقة الملونة ويقفز منها إلينا. كان الملصق جزءاً أساسياً من حياتنا، نملاً به حيطان المخيم والمدينة، ونحلم أن نعلق صورنا عليه. كلنا حلمنا برؤية صورتنا محوطة باللون الأحمر الفاقع، وبهالة الشهداء."

These lines indicate a radical shift from a time when second-generation Palestinians “used to tremble in front of these posters” and fancied having their faces adorned “with the martyr’s halo” to a present where Khalil announces that he “didn’t bring the map of Palestine of the posters of martyrs. *Nothing*” (My italics). In challenging heroic myths and deromanticizing massacres, Khalil, as Fabio Caiani argues, “takes advantage of his monopoly on Yunis’s version of reality.”²⁵⁰

Palestine as “Video Nation” and the Role of Recycled Memories

Khalil also takes issue with the victimization rhetoric adopted by first-generation Palestinians by critiquing the video mania that swept Shatila camp in the 1990s. This was a trend where elderly Palestinians sneaked back to their old villages (now Israeli cities) and filmed those visits on camera. Upon their return, they exchanged these videos with other camp families so that they too could see snippets of their old villages on TV and keep the memory of their pre-48 villages alive. In her aforementioned article, Diana Allan argues that this video trend emerged to replace traditional storytelling inside the camp and asserts that its very trendiness indicates that “the processes of transmission [are] becoming less narrative-based, more visual and increasingly individuated.”²⁵¹ Moreover, she argues that these video cassettes were constitutive of “new communication technologies” which “alter[ed] the form and content of historical discourse” inside the camp.²⁵²

The first generation’s infatuation with video as a visual re-enactment of their villages-turned-Israeli cities resonates throughout the text. In a visit to her former village in al-Kweikat in northern Palestine, Umm Hassan is welcomed by Ella Dweik, an Israeli woman who now

²⁵⁰ Fabio, “My Name is Yālū,” 141.

²⁵¹ Allan, “Mythologising Al-Nakba,” 47.

²⁵² Ibid.

occupies her house. Umm Hassan engages in a conversation with Ella as Ramy, Umm Hassan's nephew, roams around the garden with his camera, filming snippets of the green expanse. Upon her return, Umm Hassan circulates the video across the camp before finally handing it over to Khalil. For his part, Khalil comments on this video tape saying:

So the story was turned into a videotape that's now mine. He [Ramy] made the camera roam over the house and around the land and the olive orchard. But it's a beautiful tape, made up of lots of snapshots joined together. I'd have preferred a panorama, but never mind, we can imagine the scene as we watch. We've become a video nation.²⁵³

He goes on to express his growing cynicism towards the role of video as a postmemory tool:

The Shatila camp has turned into Camp Video. The videocassettes circulate among the houses, and people sit around their television sets, they remember and tell stories. They tell stories about what they see, and out of the glimpses of the villages they build villages.²⁵⁴

His "out of the glimpses of the villages they build villages," alludes to what Hirsch says of postmemory as necessitating the refugee's imagination:

Umm Hassan brought me a tape of al-Ghabsiyyeh, and some other woman brought a tape of another village—all people do is swap videotapes, and in these images we find the strength to continue. We sit in front of the small screen and see small spots, distorted pictures and close-ups, and from these we invent the country we desire. We invent our life through pictures.²⁵⁵

²⁵³ Khoury, *Gate*, 113. The text in Arabic: رامي لم يصور الحوار بين أم حسن وإيللا. لكنه شريط جميل، مؤلف من مجموعة لقطات مقربة. يا ليتني صور دويك، جعل الكاميرا تدور حول البيت وحول الأرض وحول بيارة البرتقال. ولكن لا بأس، نستطيع أن نتخيل المشهد ونحن نرى. صرنا شعب الفيديو.

²⁵⁴ Ibid., 106. The text in Arabic: الكاسيتات تنتقل بين البيوت، والناس يجلسون حول الأجهزة. ويتذكرون ويروون. يحكون ما لا يرونه، ويبنون بلادا من صور البلاد.

²⁵⁵ Khoury, *Gate*, 462. The text in Arabic: أم حسن ذهبت وجلبت لي شريطا عن الغابسية، وأم فلان ذهبت وجلبت شريطا عن قرية: أخرى، والناس لا يفعلون شيئا سوى تبادل الأشرطة. نحتمل الحياة بصورتها، نجلس أمام الشاشة الصغيرة، ونرى بقعا صغيرة وصورا مشوشة ومشاهد مقربة، فنخترع بلادنا على ذوقنا. نخترع حياتنا بالصور.

To use Drew Paul's words, video medium in the novel "functions as a technologically assisted form of memory."²⁵⁶ That this assisted form of memory has become a constant feature of camp life is clear when Khalil describes Shatila as "Camp Video." But as Paul goes on to argue, in as much as video helps shape the second-generation's memory work, "it is also finite, repetitive, and prone to distortion."²⁵⁷ I would take this argument further by saying that this visual representation of a lost space keeps the refugee trapped in his own trauma, which is clear when Khalil poses the following question to Yunis:

Or is it that you don't want your story to end, that you want to leave it open ended so you can force us to keep on playing the role of the victim for as long as God sees fit?²⁵⁸

Khalil wonders if this enforced "role of the victim" is allowing Shatila's refugees to live in the here and now:

Don't they ever get sick of repeating the same stories? Umm Hassan never slept, and, until her death, she would tell stories, until all the tears had drained from her eyes.²⁵⁹

For his part, Khalil announces that he has lost interest in this loop of repetitive re-enactments:

Should I be watching the tape every night, weeping and eventually dying from it? Or should I be filming you and turning you into a video that can make the rounds of the houses? What should I film though? Should I ask someone to play you as a young man? I might be able to play that role myself, what do you think? . . . But I'm not an actor, acting is a difficult profession!²⁶⁰

²⁵⁶ Paul, "The Grandchildren of Yūnis," 193.

²⁵⁷ Ibid.

²⁵⁸ Khoury, *Gate*, 452. The text in Arabic: "أم لا تريد لحكايتك أن تنتهي. تتركها بلا نهاية، كي تجربنا على متابعة لعب دور الضحية: إلى ما شاء الله."

²⁵⁹ Ibid., 106. The text in Arabic: "ألا يسأمون من تكرار الحكايات نفسها؟ أم حسن لم تنم، ظلت تروي حتى ماتت في دموع عينيها."

²⁶⁰ Ibid., 113. The text in Arabic: "أيجب أن اتفرج على الشريط كل ليلة وأبكي وأموت، أم يجب أن أصورك أنت، وأجعلك فيلم فيديو؟ هل أطلب من أحد تمثيل دورك شاباً؟ ما رأيك لو مثلته أنا؟.. لكنني لست ممثلاً والتمثيل مهنة صعبة. يدور في البيوت؟ ولكن ماذا أصور؟ هل أطلب من أحد تمثيل دورك شاباً؟ ما رأيك لو مثلته أنا؟.. لكنني لست ممثلاً والتمثيل مهنة صعبة."

According to Caruth, “the traumatic nature of history means that events are only historical to the extent that they implicate others” so that one traumatic story becomes about “the suffering of others’ traumas.”²⁶³ Such is the power of empathic unsettlement, which according to LaCapra involves “attending to, even trying, in limited ways, to recapture the possibly split-off, affective dimension of the experience of others.”²⁶⁴

Khalil creates this possibility of empathy by giving the Israeli the space to *talk* within the text. As he contextualizes the Holocaust trauma, Khalil is able to both sympathize with Jewish traumatic memory while remaining critical of the political project which unfolds in its name.

This is most powerfully realized in Umm Hassan’s encounter with Ella, the Israeli woman who has taken over her house.²⁶⁵ As they engage in a dialogic exchange, Ella, an Oriental/Sephardic Jew originally from Lebanon, tells Umm Hassan of her forced expulsion out of Lebanon and into Israel. She pleads to Umm Hassan to “take this wretched land back” and let her go back to Beirut.²⁶⁶ She also opens up to Umm Hassan about her own trauma:

She told Um Hassan how she’d lived in the Maabarot, where they’d sprayed the Sephardic Jews with insecticide, as though they were animals, before admitting them to stone barracks.²⁶⁷

²⁶³ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 18.

²⁶⁴ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 40.

²⁶⁵ Khoury, *Gate*, 108.

²⁶⁶ Ibid., 112. The text in Arabic: "خدي كل هالأرض المقطوعة"

²⁶⁷ Ibid., 114. The text in Arabic: "أخبرتها كيف عاشت في "المعبروت" حيث كانوا يرشون اليهود الشرقيين بالمبيدات كأنهم حيوانات، قبل إدخالهم البراكات الحجرية"

Ella relays to Umm Hassan how upon her arrival to Israel, she was forced to take off her clothes so she could be showered then sprayed with “cylindrical sprayer.”²⁶⁸ She tells of how her father’s fez was removed, how the Israelis thought “he was a Muslim” and interrogated him as a result, “before asking him to remove his clothes and spraying him—letting him get used to standing naked—without a fez, forever.”²⁶⁹ As Ella concludes her story, Umm Hassan, allegedly the last person who should feel empathetic towards Ella, *weeps*.

By opening up the text to Jewish traumatic memory, Khalil draws on what LaCapra describes as the “traumatic experience of others,” by carrying out the aforementioned concept of “empathic unsettlement.”²⁷⁰ He recognizes Ella’s traumatic experience as an Oriental Jew who was ruptured by her enforced abandonment of her home in Lebanon and her subsequent resettlement in Israel, but holds that her traumatic experience does not legitimize her presence in Umm Hassan’s house, nor does it justify the Zionist project. Khalil creates this possibility of empathy with Ella’s story without falling into the “danger” of “de-contextualization.”²⁷¹ He announces that he will continue to engage with Jewish traumatic memory through “mirroring”:

because I’d learned the secret of war. This secret is the mirror. I know no one will agree with me, and they’ll say I talk like this because I’m afraid, but it’s not true. If you’re afraid, you don’t say your enemy is your mirror, you run away from him.²⁷²

To conclude this section, it is important to stress that by mediating the 1948 *Nakbah* narratives, Khalil is not after a total abandonment of this traumatic legacy in as much as he

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "أقبل أن يسمحوا له بأن يخلع ثيابه، ويرش بالمبيدات، ويعتاد البقاء عاريا من طربوشه إلى الأبد."

²⁷⁰ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 41.

²⁷¹ Stephan Milich and Lamia Moghnieh, “Trauma: Social Realities and Cultural Texts,” *Meta Journal* 11 (2018):7, <https://doi.org/10.17192/meta.2018.11.7941>.

²⁷² Ibid., 287. The text in Arabic: "لأنني تعلمت سر الحرب، وسر الحرب اسمه المرأة. أعرف أن لا أحد سيوافقني، وسيقولون إنني أخفي هكذا لأنني خائف. لكن لا. الخائف لا يقول إن عدوه مرآته، بل يهرب منه."

hopes to perform what Ihab Saloul describes as the “positive function of nostalgia.”²⁷³ According to Saloul, a positive function of nostalgia is one in which nostalgic memory is employed “as a potentially productive mode of remembering that goes beyond recovering or idealizing the past, and instead functions as a cultural response to the loss of home in exile” or “a reconstitution of injured subjectivities.”²⁷⁴ Khalil carries out this positive function by giving the 1948 trauma its due before revisiting some of its aspects, in the process reconstituting his own injured subjectivity. To use Saloul’s words, his is a “present-oriented memorization,” in which, as son of postmemory, he seeks to transcend the “idealization of past narratives” by moving on to the “immediate present of exile” and suggesting the present as a continuation of this past trauma.²⁷⁵ In other words, sieving through older traumas allows Khalil to realize the existence of present ones.

In the next and final section, I show how Khalil’s postmemorial work allows him to capture and narrativize his own trauma. He begins to open up about his traumatic experiences first as an orphan, then as a defeated fighter, victim-witness and duped lover. Together, these fragmented narratives allow him to imagine an alternative postness.

Tapping into Khalil’s Trauma

My grandmother used to drown me in stories . . . Now I feel that I have to push the stories aside in order to see clearly, for all I see is spots, as though that woman’s stories were like colored spots drifting around me.²⁷⁶

As he carries out his postmemorial remembrances, Khalil grows adept at “push[ing] the stories aside” and “see[ing] clearly.” This shift transpires in the second half of the novel when

²⁷³Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile*, 10.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

²⁷⁶ Khoury, *Gate*, 356-357. The text in Arabic: "جدتي كانت تغرقني بالحكايات...أشعر الآن، أنني أزيح الحكايات من حولي كي أرى، فلا أرى سوى البقع، كأن حكايات تلك المرأة تشبه البقع الملونة التي تطفو حولي."

he starts opening up about his earlier traumas and narrates them. As he engages in this form of telling, Khalil also sheds light on the traumatic memory that preceded this narration. He writes of the post-trauma symptoms that haunted and trapped him in an unconscious repetition of the traumatic event. He opens his narration with the most recent traumatic event, that of the Lebanese Civil War:

Lebanon blew up in our faces. An entire country reduced to splinters, and we found ourselves running around among the shattered fragments of districts, cities, villages, sects.²⁷⁷

As a former freedom fighter, Khalil experiences firsthand the defeat of the Palestinian political movement as manifested by the Lebanon that “blew up.” He also witnesses the death and demise of his comrades. For a long time after the war, Khalil struggles with repetitive flashbacks and nightmares during which he experiences his earlier, repressed traumas. That these haunting symptoms creep on his consciousness is clear when he describes the war memory as a recurring dream:

The civil war had become a long dream, as though it had never happened. I can feel it under my skin, but I don’t believe it. Only the images remain. Even our massacre here in the camp and the flies that hunted me down I see as though they were photos, as though I weren’t remembering but watching. I don’t feel anything but astonishment. Strange, isn’t it? Stranger that war should pass like a dream.²⁷⁸

These war traumas are exacerbated by the fact that Khalil sustains an injury and is consequently declared “unfit for war.” He is given the option of studying a medicine course in China and becoming a doctor, at which point “Khalil the officer was swept away, and in came

²⁷⁷ Ibid., 146. The text in Arabic: "لأن لبنان انفجر بين أيدينا. بلاد كاملة صارت إلى شظايا، وصرنا نركض بين شظايا الأحياء والمدن والقرى والطوائف المختلفة."

²⁷⁸ Ibid., 274. The text in Arabic: "الحرب الأهلية صارت مثل منام طويل، كأنها لم تحدث. أشعر بنكهتها تحت جلدي ولكني لا أصدقها. أراه أمامي كأنه صورة. كأنني لا أتذكر بل أشاهد. لا أفعل بل لم يبق منها سوى الصور. حتى مذبحتنا هنا في المخيم، والذباب الذي افترسني، أراه أمامي كأنه صورة. كأنني لا أتذكر بل أشاهد. لا أفعل بل أصاب بالدهشة. غريب، أليس كذلك، غريب أن تمر الحرب كالمنام."

Khalil the doctor.”²⁷⁹ But Khalil is bitter about having to go back to the “beginning” to pursue a new career:

But what do I mean by “begin my life?” When I say “begin,” does it mean that everything I did before doesn’t count?²⁸⁰

The possibility of traumatization chases him even beyond the battleground. In his capacity as doctor at Shatila’s Galilee Hospital, Khalil witnesses first-hand the Shatila massacre and the subsequent War of the Camps:

I stayed in the hospital for a month treating the dead, eating eggplant, and watching the Israeli planes launch bombing raids like they were competing in firework displays. I lived with death, but I couldn’t absorb it. They all died. They came, and as soon as we’d put them in beds, they died.²⁸¹

The sight of dead bodies attacked by flies overwhelm his war memory:

I won’t forget the buzzing blue flies over those bodies acting as reservoirs for all the death in the world. I won’t forget how we stepped over the distended vertical bodies, holding our noses.²⁸²

These flies and ants that swarm over the dead haunt him in his dreams:

Then I fall asleep. The memories come like swarms of ants invading my mind, and with their spiraling motion I sleep.²⁸³

²⁷⁹ Ibid., 166. The text in Arabic: "انزاح خليل الطابط و جاء خليل الطبيب."

²⁸⁰ Ibid., 54. The text in Arabic: "ولكن ماذا يعني أن أبدأ حياتي، وحين أقول أبدأ، هل يعني هذا أن كل ما فعلته لم يكن شيئاً."

²⁸¹ Ibid., 99. The text in Arabic: "بقيت شهراً داخل المستشفى أعالج الموتى، وأكل الباذنجان، وأتفرج على الطائرات الإسرائيلية تقصف كأنها في مباريات للألعاب النارية. عشت مع الموت ولم استوعب، وكل الناس ماتوا. يأتون، ويح نضعهم في أسرة المستشفى يموتون."

²⁸² Ibid., 287. The text in Arabic: "لا أنسى سحابة الذباب الزرقاء التي كانت تطن فوق تلك الأجساد التي اختزن كل الموت في العالم. لا أنسى كيف فشخنا فوق الجثث العمودية المنتفخة، ونحن نسد أنوفنا."

²⁸³ Ibid., 53. The text in Arabic: "ثم أغفو. تأتي الذكريات كقطعان من النمل التي تحتل رأسي، وأذهب مع حركتها اللولبية إلى النوم."

Khalil continues his narration by relaying how the human body was violated beyond death. The hospital, the only one in Shatila, was short on resources and could not give the dead a proper burial:

We covered them with quicklime to kill the germs and wiped away their features before throwing them into the hole, which later became a soccer field.²⁸⁴

As he maps the war-induced trauma that transpired in the camp and traces how the human body was infringed upon and violated, Khalil begins to open up about another, albeit much older, massacre that happened in his own life, i.e. the murder of his own father. Khalil was only a child when his father was killed at their home's door step and therefore hardly remembers it. It is his grandmother that passes the murder scene down to him which remains intact in his memory even decades after the murder. His memory is jumbled up and tricks him into believing that he witnessed the murder himself:

I also started my life with a massacre; what else would you call my father's murder? True, I was young and can hardly remember anything, but I can still imagine the scene. What my grandmother told me about his death turned into images that haunt me.²⁸⁵

The image of his father's blood-covered body, which Khalil elsewhere in the text says was reminiscent of "a slaughtered limb," still haunts Khalil, even as he approaches the age of 40.²⁸⁶ He says:

at this crossroads the image of that man who left me so he could die still imposes itself on me, and always will.²⁸⁷

²⁸⁴ Ibid., 256. The text in Arabic: "غطوهم بالكلس الأبيض من أجل قتل الجرائم، ومحووا وجوههم، قبل رميهم في تلك الحفرة، التي صارت ملعباً لكرة القدم."

²⁸⁵ Ibid., 306. The text in Arabic: "فأنا أيضاً بدأت حياتي بمذبحة، ماذا تسمي قتل أبي؟ صحيح أنني كنت صغيراً، ولا أكاد أذكر شيئاً، لكن المشهد ماثل أمامي، كأن أخبار جدتي عن موته تحولت لصورة تلاحقني."

²⁸⁶ Ibid., 176. The text in Arabic: "كأنه خروف مذبح"

²⁸⁷ Ibid., 306. The text in Arabic: "أنا الآن أقف على مفترقات الأربعين، وفي المفترقات تعود صورة ذلك الرجل الذي تركني من أجل أن يموت."

As if not traumatized enough by his father's brutal murder, Khalil witnesses his sister's death, followed by his mother's escape to Jordan following her double loss. Together, these distressing events compound his loss and leave him struggling with a feeling of utter abandonment: "I lost my own life right at the beginning, when my mother left me and escaped to Jordan."²⁸⁸

These external stimuli attack his mental apparatus and seep into his consciousness without being filtered nor comprehended. A repression of trauma ensues:

The subject didn't interest me much because when she disappeared, I was a child, and when I grew older, I held a grudge against her and didn't pay much attention to her story.²⁸⁹

For a while, Khalil doesn't "pay much attention to her [his mother's] story" but the memory soon returns to haunt him in incessant flashbacks, especially when later in the text he discovers that his mother is still alive:

What if I found my mother? I don't want her now, and I don't love her. But why? Why should her ghost come and inhabit this room with me?²⁹⁰

According to Caruth, the flashbacks, nightmares and repetitions that return to haunt the traumatized individual following a traumatic experience hint at a "history [of trauma] that literally *has no place*."²⁹¹ The subconscious does not register the event, "neither in the past, in which it was not fully experienced, nor in the present, in which its precise images and

²⁸⁸ Ibid., 139. The text in Arabic: "أنا خسرت حياتي منذ البداية، حين تركتني أمي و هربت إلى الأردن."

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 368. The text in Arabic: "لم يشغل هذا الموضوع بالي كثيرا، فأنا كنت طفلا حين اختفت وحين كبرت حقدت عليها، ولم أحفل بحكايتها."

²⁹⁰ Ibid., 376. The text in Arabic: "ماذا لو وجدت أمي؟ أنا لا أريدها الآن، ولا أحبها. ولكن لماذا؟ لماذا يأتي شبحها ليسكن هذه الغرفة معي؟"

²⁹¹ Caruth, "Introduction, Part II," 153.

enactments are not fully understood.”²⁹² Only when the traumatized individual is able to give these flashbacks linguistic meaning—and thereby shift from a traumatic to a narrative memory by telling a somehow coherent story, is the traumatic experience “integrated into one’s own, and others’ knowledge of the past.”²⁹³ Following Caruth’s line of thought, we see how Khalil moves from a repression of trauma in the first half of the novel to a fragmented articulation of it that transpires in the second half. In the opening pages of the novel, Khalil tries to remember his traumas except that they are not available to his conscious recollection:

I lie on my bed. And try to summon up the image of the ants, but it won’t come. I think of shams, I see her mutilated body, and sleep won’t come.²⁹⁴

Later in the novel, he becomes increasingly aware of these different images:

Before Shams, I was ignorant of this. When she died, I became aware of my amputated limbs and the parts of me that were already buried; I *became conscious* of my father and my grandmother, even my mother. I saw them as an organ that had been ripped out of me by force.²⁹⁵

“This” is an allusion to his older traumas which are activated by Shams’ death, what Caruth describes as the “unconsciousness of leaving that bears the impact of history” or “historical truth.”²⁹⁶ Suddenly, Khalil is made aware of his “amputated limbs” and “the parts” of him “that were already buried.” I read Khalil’s “I became conscious of my father, and my grandmother, even my mother” as an indication that he becomes conscious of the traumas he repressed following these traumatic losses. It is this evoked consciousness that allows him to narrate his trauma.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Ibid., 154.

²⁹⁴ Khoury, *Gate*, 53. The text in Arabic: أفكر في شمس، أراها مقطعة إلى أشلاء، ولا يأتي النوم.

²⁹⁵ Ibid., 517. The text in Arabic: نسيتها، رأيتها وكأنها جزء انتزع من جسدي بالقوة.

²⁹⁶ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 23.

The point in the text that signals that Khalil has partially worked through his trauma is when he leaves Yunis' side to run a simple errand. Before he departs, Khalil announces the end of his storytelling journey:

For six months I've been with you, paralyzed by fear. Your new infancy has just liberated me from it . . . My fear is gone.²⁹⁷

His long-awaited liberation from fear allows him to imagine his life beyond the traumatic. He adds:

Your death came and rescued me. You made me a doctor again, you brought me to live with you here in the hospital, and you allowed me to recover my desire for life.²⁹⁸

When Khalil returns to the hospital, Yunis has already died. His immediate reaction is of guilt, which he is quickly able to surpass:

I decided it was time for me to weep, mourn, to be unconsolable. I decided you were dead and that I'd go on with my life without you, without the hospital and without our stories, of which we've only told fractions.²⁹⁹

His "I'd go on with my life without you," signals Khalil's success at freeing himself from his inherited trauma. Shedding the traces of the 1948 trauma allows him to articulate and work out his own defeats, and in Caruth's words, "exit into the freedom of forgetting."³⁰⁰

As the text closes, Khalil is still a refugee in the war-torn Shatila camp. He is still grappling with the reality of life as a second-generation Palestinian refugee. The trauma is an

²⁹⁷ Khoury, *Gate*, 459. The text in Arabic: "سنة أشهر وأنا معك، وخوفي يشلني. أما الآن، فلقد حررتني طفولتك الجديدة من الخوف."

²⁹⁸ Ibid., 509. The text in Arabic: "وجاء موتك لينقذني، أعدتني طبيبا، واسكنتني معك في المستشفى، وسمحت لي باستعادة رغبتني في الحياة."

²⁹⁹ Ibid., 530. The text in Arabic: "قررت أنك مت، وأنني سأكمل حياتي من دونك، ومن دون المستشفى، ومن دون حكاياتنا التي لم نرو سوى أجزاء صغيرة منها."

³⁰⁰ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 32.

enduring reality because the *Nakbah* is an ongoing event. While it is true that Khalil's trauma work helps ease his past wounds (the collective and the personal), it does not and cannot protect him from an ongoing, relentless, trauma (resulting from the ongoing *Nakbah*). As such, I'd like to conclude by suggesting that Khalil's postmemorial work is an example of what Ihab Saloul describes as "exilic narrativity," a narrativity that "leads to compassion (and identification) with the story of the past *nakba* but . . . also positions and activates Palestinian memory of loss of homeland in a specific context—the catastrophic present of exile."³⁰¹

Conclusion

As he carries out this narrativization of trauma beginning with the 1948 *Nakbah* and on to the following decades, Khalil is able to make more sense of his own psychic fragmentation. He frees himself from the 1948 traumatic legacy, and subsequently works through his own repressed traumas, both undertakings of which allow him to organize the forgetting necessary for his continued survival in Shatila camp.

On a second level, Khalil's narrative opens the text to the collective trauma experienced by the peasants of the Galilee on the eve of the *Nakbah*. The text follows the traumatized peasants as they grapple with their fresh traumas and it charts their early responses to the loss of their Galilee. As Khalil gives them the space to narrate their traumatic experience, he implicates the political stressors—both the Lebanese war actors as well as the Zionist enterprise-- which stand behind and feed into this ongoing trauma. By opening up trauma to narrativity, the novel undoes the silence that shrouds Palestinian traumatic experience during *Nakbah*.

³⁰¹ Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile*, 83.

Children of the Ghetto, My Name Is Adam:

Revealing the Palestinian Ghetto

Introduction

In this chapter, I look at Elias Khoury's 2016 novel, *āwlād al-ghitu, ismī Adam* (*Children of the Ghetto, My Name Is Adam*, 2018). I suggest that the novel is an attempt by Khoury to expose a silenced chapter in Palestinian traumatic memory: i.e. how Palestinian cities that fell within the parameters of Israel after the 1948 *Nakbah* were fenced in and ghettoized by the Israeli army. I argue that Khoury writes *My Name Is Adam* to respond to two types of silence: silence forced on the archive, and silence as a result of an exclusivity imposed on trauma.

I then introduce the novel and chart some of the scholarly attention it has received before moving to my suggested reading of it. I trace how Adam, a second-generation Palestinian-Israeli living in New York, suffers a complex trauma following the 1948 *Nakbah*. He is orphaned by the catastrophe, traumatized by his experience as the first son of the ghetto, and goes on to grapple with a life-long crisis resulting from his ruptured identity as a Palestinian inside Israel. He lives his life in flight from his traumas and metaphorizes his traumatic experience by writing an autobiographical novel on a classical Arab poet, until three different

encounters reactivate his older traumas and drive him to write his own memoir instead. As he transcribes his memoir, Adam narrates the collective trauma that followed the ghettoization of Lydda in 1948. The novel captures Lydda's fall, the brutal expulsion and massacre of its people, and finally the ghettoization of its remaining residents. Here again, the text becomes the site of two traumatic experiences: Adam's own identity crisis juxtaposed with the collective trauma experienced by Lydda's residents during and after 1948.

Un-Silencing the Ghetto Memory

In a 2018 interview with Hassina Mechaï from the *Middle East Monitor*, Elias Khoury describes his 2016 novel *My Name Is Adam* saying:

Everything is fictional in this novel . . . except for the existence of this ghetto. How the ghetto works, the forced-labor, the people who had to bury the corpses of the Palestinian victims, all these were true.³⁰²

The novel is part one of Khoury's *Children of the Ghetto* trilogy and was translated into English by Humphrey Davies in 2018. Like *The Kingdom of Strangers* and *Gate of the Sun*, *My Name Is Adam* responds to a major gap in historiographical writing. It exposes the hardly known fact that following the 1948 *Nakbah*, many Arab communities who remained within their fallen cities were fenced in and ghettoized by Israel's occupying army until roughly the end of 1949 when these ghettos were removed and became present-day Arab quarters in Israel.

³⁰² Hassina Mechaï, "From Jewish Ghettos to Palestinian Ghettos; Elias Khoury on His New Novel," *Middle East Monitor*, February 22, 2018, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20180222-from-jewish-ghettos-to-palestinian-ghettos-elias-khoury-on-his-new-novel/>.

This historiographical silence persists to this day, even seven decades after the catastrophe. In a 2018 interview with Andrea Apostu, Khoury says that he was stunned to learn that “these places were named ghettos by the Israeli army” itself, adding that he could only find references to this ghetto phenomenon in “some memoirs of people from the city of Lydda and Haifa.”³⁰³ Adamant to document this missing episode in modern Palestinian history, Khoury reportedly spent three years collecting the testimonials that inspire the novel’s main narrative strands. Most of these were in the form of Skype calls with Palestinians who had left the ghetto decades earlier and were now settled in Amman, Jordan.³⁰⁴

My Name Is Adam challenges Israel’s disavowal of a cruel phase in its occupation’s history—the ghettoization of Palestinian towns-- and in so doing, re-appropriates the Palestinian right to an archive. A fictional Khoury announces this narrative aim in a foreword to the novel. In this opening statement, this Khoury—who is dissociated from the real author of the novel-- denies his authorship of the text, stating that he met the real writer of this novel, a Palestinian-Israeli man by the name of Adam Dannoun, in 2005 in New York where Khoury was teaching Arabic literature at the time. Following Adam’s shadowy death “in a fire” at his New York home, a friend of Adam’s confides in Khoury and gives him a set of “ordinary, ruled, Five Star university notebooks” which were abandoned by Adam.³⁰⁵ These notebooks comprise an incomplete novel as well as a memoir, both of which are themed on the fallen writer’s traumatic experience as son of the Lydda ghetto. Adam also leaves behind his will in which he imposes silence on his own trauma narrative and asks for these notebooks to be burnt along with his body, before “throwing his ashes into the Hudson.”³⁰⁶

³⁰³ Andrea Apostu, “Elias Khoury: ‘Literature is the History of Ordinary People,’” *Bookaholic*, June 25, 2018, <https://www.bookaholic.ro/elias-khoury-literature-is-the-history-of-ordinary-people-interview.html>.

³⁰⁴ “Silence As Communication: A Conversation with Elias Khoury,” *Pen Transmissions*, November 2, 2018, <https://pentransmissions.com/2018/11/02/a-conversation-with-elias-khoury>.

³⁰⁵ Elias Khoury, *My Name Is Adam*, trans. Humphrey Davies (London: MacLehose Press, 2018), 13.

³⁰⁶ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "وأنهم أحرقوا جثته وألقوا الرماد في نهر الهادسون."

For his part, Khoury refuses to carry out this act of silence and decides to combine both writing projects into one manuscript and publish them. He tweaks the order of their segments and adds a few headings before sending the manuscript off to Beirut's *Dār al-adab* thus "realizing" his long-held "dream of writing a sequel to *Gate of the Sun*."³⁰⁷ The relationship between both texts being how they are preoccupied with the silences that underpin the history of the Palestinian *Nakbah*. Before referring the manuscript to *Dār al-adab*, Khoury contemplates possible titles for the soon to be published novel. He goes from his initial choice of *The Notebooks of Adam Dannoun* to *Children of the Ghetto*:

I decided that the book should expose a truth to which no-one previously had paid any attention, namely that the Palestinian women and men who had managed to remain in their land were the children of the little ghettos into which they had been forced by the new state that had taken over their country, erasing its name.³⁰⁸

By granting himself the authority to 'name' the manuscript, Khoury "intervenes as an author to complete the act of breaking the silence."³⁰⁹

My Name Is Adam objects to another type of silence: i.e. Israel's continued attempts to discredit Palestinian trauma narratives on the grounds that European Jewry suffered a more intense traumatic experience, as exemplified by the anti-Jewish Pogroms and the Holocaust. It is this tension between both traumatic histories that is problematized in the text.

I read this tension between Palestinian and Jewish traumas as analogous to another tension discussed by Khoury in a foreword note to Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg's new

³⁰⁷ Ibid., 15. The text in Arabic: "هكذا أكون قد حققت حلمي في كتابة الجزء الثاني من رواية 'باب الشمس'."

³⁰⁸ Ibid., 17. The text in Arabic: "وقررت أن هذا الكتاب يكشف حقيقة لم ينتبه إليها أحد، وهي أن الفلسطينيين والفلستينيات الذين استطاعوا البقاء في أرضهم، هم أولاد الغيتوات الصغيرة التي حشرتهم فيها الدولة الجديدة التي استولت على بلادهم ومحت اسمها."

³⁰⁹ Raef Zreik, "Writing Silence: Reading Khoury's Novel *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam*," in *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History*, ed. Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 320.

edited volume *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History*. It is a tension between the Jewish term *Sabonim* (Hebrew for soap) and the Palestinian Nablus soap. According to Khoury, *Sabonim* refers to the “survivors of the Holocaust who had made their way to the “Promised Land”” upon the institutionalization of the Zionist project in 1948.³¹⁰ The term, Khoury adds, was also a “reference to one of the alleged barbaric practices of the Nazi Holocaust, which was to produce soap from the bodies of its victims.”³¹¹ According to Khoury, the word *Sabonim* was used to terrorize Palestinian artist Mona Hatoum who in a 1996 art installation put together 2400 Nablus soap blocks to create a map of occupied Palestine. Suddenly, all hell broke loose and Hatoum’s usage of soap was criticized as a “racist sanctioning of Nazi crimes.”³¹² This interpretation of the Palestinian artist’s work left Khoury dumbfounded and wondering if:

the Palestinian artist is not to be allowed to use Nablus’s soap for fear of stirring up a Zionist interpretation of her art that destroys the very essence of its humanity, how then are Palestinians to express their tragedy? Or must their tragedy be obliterated because a more tragic narrative was crafted in the gas chambers of a racist Europe?³¹³

Khoury responds to both types of silence—silence imposed on the archive and silence as a consequence of an imposed exclusivity to trauma—by de-territorializing the word ‘ghetto,’ itself a major signifier of Jewish traumatic memory. He appropriates this term to capture a post-*Nakbah* traumatic reality, whereby European Jewry unghettoized themselves by creating ghettos in the Palestine they occupied. This reproduction of the ghetto prompts Khoury’s labeling of the Palestinians as “victims of the victims” or more precisely as “double victims.”³¹⁴

³¹⁰ Elias Khoury, “Foreword,” in *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History*, ed. Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), IX.

³¹¹ Ibid.

³¹² Ibid., X.

³¹³ Ibid.

³¹⁴ Apostu, “Elias Khoury.

Khoury also adopts the “ghetto” to carry out his favored concept of mirroring. His is not a suggestion that the Holocaust and *Nakbah* are “mirror images,” because as he has argued elsewhere, the Holocaust was a traumatic event, while the *Nakbah* is an ongoing traumatic experience. However, it is the Jew and the Palestinian as traumatized subjects who “are able to become mirror images,” of one another and “of human suffering” as a whole.³¹⁵ According to Khoury, mirroring entails that both peoples recognize each other’s experiences of trauma and thereby “disabuse themselves of the delusion of exclusionist, nationalist ideologies.”³¹⁶ He also adds that an ethical commitment to anti-racism becomes one where we can speak of the Holocaust “as a collective human memory,” while concurrently “adopting a solid stance against expansionist colonial occupations, of which Israel is the last remaining rampart.”³¹⁷

Children of the Ghetto: My Name Is Adam

My Name Is Adam is centered on the character of Adam Dannoun, a second generation Palestinian-Israeli who immigrated to the U.S. decades earlier and now divides his time between writing literature and managing his *falafel* restaurant in New York. Dannoun is originally from Lydda town. He is a newborn when the *Nakbah* happens. His father is killed in the catastrophe, he grows up in Lydda’s post-1948 ghetto, then relocates to Mount Carmel, followed by Haifa, and finally to Tel Aviv where he pursues a career in literature and journalism before winding up in the U.S. As he waltzes from one place to the other, Adam settles on suppressing his traumatic experience--as son of the ghetto and a confused Palestinian-Israeli concurrently-- and hiding his Palestinianness.

³¹⁵ Khoury, “Foreword,” XVI.

³¹⁶ Ibid.

³¹⁷ Ibid., XIII.

When the text opens, it is 2005 and Adam sits in his New York apartment where he has embarked on writing his memoir. This writing project is triggered by three incidents which together activate Adam's older traumas and encourage him to abort his novel project on Ummayyad poet Waddah al-Yamman, which he hoped could be an indirect and safe entry point to his own traumatic story. He begins writing his memoir, narrating his formative years in post-*Nakbah* Palestine, and discussing his troubled identity as a Palestinian inside Israel. He reveals how he addressed his psychic fragmentation by suppressing his Palestinianness and immigrating to New York. As he carries out his memory work, Adam pieces together testimonials told to him by other ghetto residents, thereby opening the text to the collective trauma experienced by Palestinians of Lydda following the 1948 *Nakbah*. The narrative follows them as they suffer multiple traumatic assaults: the fall of Lydda, the subsequent massacre and expulsion of its people, followed by the ghettoization of the remaining residents. The novel therefore emerges as a repository of two traumatic histories: that of collective trauma as experienced by the Lydda residents on the eve of the 1948 *Nakbah*, as well as Adam's personal traumas as a Lydda ghetto survivor and a Palestinian-Israeli respectively.

Told in the first person, *My Name Is Adam* comprises two manuscripts: Adam's incomplete novel on Waddah al-Yamman, followed by his memoir which constitutes two thirds of the text.

Beyond Adam as the main protagonist of the novel, other characters include Ma'moun Khudr, a blind father-like figure for Adam and a former ghetto resident who leaves Lydda to Cairo to pursue a degree in Arabic literature and ends up as a researcher on 'silence' in Palestinian literature. There is also Adam's mother, Manal, who was a nurse at Lydda's

hospital on the eve of the *Nakbah*, and who survives the Lydda ghetto, before relocating to Mount Karmel with her new, abusive, husband, Abdallah al-Ashhal.

Other characters include Sarang Lee, the Korean student and Adam's friend who is delegated the task of burning Adam's manuscript. There is Dalia, an Iraqi-Jewish woman and Adam's semi-lover whom he meets ten years earlier in Germany, and who accompanies Adam on his first trip to Lydda as an adult. There is also Murad al-Alamy, another ghetto survivor who now lives in New York and whose testimonies are interwoven into Adam's memoir.

The novel is continuing to receive scholarly attention and has occupied a whole review section in Amos Golberg and Bashir Bashir's aforementioned volume *A New Grammar: Nakba and Holocaust*. In her review of the book, Refqa Abu-Remaileh reads *My Name Is Adam* as a "new beginning and a departure from Khoury's earlier works, which are primarily consumed with the Lebanese civil war and the stories of Palestinian refugees in Lebanon."³¹⁸ Abu-Remaileh finds much to appreciate about Khoury's deconstructive writing and praises how the novel uncovers "new narrative spaces for the writing together of fundamental dissonances at the heart of the Palestinian story: fragments/whole; beginning/end; life/death; documentary/fiction; poetry/prose; language/silence; literature/history; memory/forgetting; Palestinian/Israeli; Lidd ghetto/Warsaw ghetto; and even Nakba/Holocaust."³¹⁹ While Khoury problematizes these binaries in *The Kingdom of Strangers* and *Gate of the Sun*, it is in *My Name Is Adam* that he takes a bolder approach. As Abu-Remaileh puts it, Khoury "carves open a

³¹⁸ Refqa Abu-Remaileh, "Novel as Contrapuntal Reading: Elias Khoury's *Children of the Ghetto: My Name Is Adam*," in *The Holocaust and the Nakba: A New Grammar of Trauma and History*, ed. Bashir Bashir and Amos Goldberg (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 295.

³¹⁹ Ibid., 297.

narrative space that can contain, through its very structure, form and aesthetics, the different degrees of tragedy and trauma that inextricably link the Holocaust and the *Nakba*.³²⁰

It is this relationship between history and literature that interests Raef Zreik in his chapter “Writing Silence: Reading Khoury’s Novel *Children of the Ghetto: My Name Is Adam*.” Zreik argues that *My Name Is Adam* “attempts to regain the right to narrate a story,” adding that it is “an attempt by a Palestinian to rescue himself and his people from the brink of oblivion, forgetfulness, absence, and muteness.”³²¹ According to Zreik, the novel responds to two kinds of silence: the “international silence” about the “ongoing” *Nakbah*, as well as the self-imposed silence of the traumatized and their “inability and unwillingness to tell.”³²²

Narrating Trauma: Between Metaphor and Memoir

Following Khoury’s introduction to the text, *My Name Is Adam* opens with a chapter titled “The Will.” It is 2005 and Adam Dannoun looks out his window as its snows over New York. Now in his late fifties, he writes of his looming death:

I know New York is my last stop I shall die here and my body will be burnt and my ashes scattered in the Hudson river.³²³

As he approaches his end, Adam realizes that he has lived in the void. He had emigrated to New York to “forget everything” and was adamant on “chang[ing]” his name” but now feels that he will die “before that happens.”³²⁴ It occurs to him that the “refuge” he had built to

³²⁰ Ibid., 304.

³²¹ Zreik, “Writing Silence,” 309.

³²² Ibid.

³²³ Khoury, *My Name*, 21. The text in Arabic: “أعرف أن نيويورك محطتي الأخيرة، هنا سوف أموت، وستحرق جثتي وينثر رمادي في نهر الهادسون.”

³²⁴ Ibid., 22, The text in Arabic: “حين قررت الهجرة إلى نيويورك، كنت مصمما على نسيان كل شيء. حتى أنني قررت أنني لحظة حصولي على الجنسية الأميركية سوف أغير اسمي. لكن يبدو أنني ساموت قبل أن يحصل ذلك.”

accommodate his “despair” and self-imposed “loneliness” and shield him from “a descent into naivety and futility” has all been in vain.³²⁵

Adam has been on the run from his traumas for almost four decades now. His constant movement is a result of the rupture that occurs in his experience of the world following the fall of Lydda in 1948 and his emerging identity as a Palestinian inside Israel. He leaves the Lydda ghetto to Haifa where he studies Hebrew literature, then becomes a professor of Arabic literature and language, before moving to Tel Aviv where he quits teaching and embarks on a career in music journalism.

In Tel Aviv, Adam settles on suppressing his psychic fragmentation by taking refuge in “ambiguities.”³²⁶ He identifies himself as an Israeli but speaks in a Galilean accent; he implies that he is a survivor of the Warsaw ghetto but manages a *falafel* restaurant, all at once. As he relays his will, Adam maps out his earlier attempts at tapping into his suppressed trauma; the first being an autobiographical novel about Waddah al-Yamman.

Waddah al-Yamman and Metaphorizing Trauma

Had I the daring of those who write autobiographies, I would write of my own sorrow and pain.³²⁷

Adam tries to grasp the nuances of his trauma by writing a novel on Waddah al-Yamman, an incomplete first draft of which is located immediately after the “Will” chapter. He tells us that he first came across al-Yamman’s story in his capacity as literature professor

³²⁵ Khoury, *My Name*, 23. The text in Arabic: "صنعت يأسى بنفسي، وجعلت منه فينا أستظله ويحميني من السقوط في السذاجة واللاجوى."

³²⁶ Ibid., 11.

³²⁷ Ibid., 36. The text in Arabic: "لو كنت أمتلك جرأة أولئك الذين يكتبون سيرة حياتهم، لكتبت حزني وألمي"

at Haifa University. He was reading Abī al-Faraj al-Asfahānī's *Kitāb al-aghānī* (*The Book of Songs*) when he stumbled upon al-Yamman's poignant love story which left the famous poet in the shackles of death. The idea of dying for the sake of love intrigues Adam and he decides to write a novel about the "tale of [al-Yamman's] love for two women and of how he died twice over."³²⁸

It is al-Yamman's "silent death" that moves Adam to undertake this project.³²⁹ Adam recognizes in al-Yamman's silence a familiarity which in turn reminds him of his own silence. He trusts that tapping into al-Yamman's story may bring him "close" to himself.³³⁰

As such, Adam proceeds to sketch a biography of the fallen poet, relying on information from the poet's transmitter as well as snippets from the late poet's own repertoire. He writes of the Yemeni poet's first love, a certain Rawda from the Kinda tribe. Her family stand in the way of their budding love story and decide to marry her off to a man many years her senior. al-Yamman's agony is aggravated when he finds out that Rawda got leprosy and was abandoned by her family in the "valley of the lepers" in the Arabian Peninsula.³³¹ He pays her a visit, except that her disintegrating body frightens him and he abandons her out of fear. Sad and overridden by guilt, al-Yamman slowly loses his mind, thus becoming "Waddah the Madman."³³²

He leaves to the Holy House in Mecca where he is seen by the wife of al-Walid ibn Abd al-Malik in Damascus, Umm al-Banin. Umm al-Banin had long "hoped the poets would

³²⁸ Ibid., 35, The text in Arabic: "عن هذا اليأس، سوف أكتب قصة شاعري الجميل وضاح اليمن، و حكاية عشقه لامرأتين وموته مرتين."

³²⁹ Ibid., 29, The text in Arabic: "لكنه يمثل بالنسبة لي أقصى ما يستطيعه الحب. الموت صمتًا."

³³⁰ Ibid., 41, The text in Arabic: "بل علي أن أكتب قصصهم كي أقترب من نفسي."

³³¹ Ibid., 33.

³³² Ibid., 52.

write erotic verse about her.”³³³ When she sees al-Yamman circumambulating the Holy House, she approaches him and invites him to relocate to Damascus, promising to help him make a living by writing eulogies for the caliph. Excited by the possibility of a new love, al-Yamman moves to Damascus where a love story blooms between him and the caliph’s wife. He gets into the habit of sneaking into the caliph’s palace daily and making love to Umm al-Banin in one of her rooms. Every night, when the caliph returns, Umm al-Banin would hide al-Yamman inside one of her expensive Damascene coffer. Eventually, the caliph “smell[s] betrayal” and plans a smart revenge.³³⁴ One night, the caliph comes in and asks her to gift him one of her Damascene coffer. He chooses the very coffer that houses al-Yamman. For her part, Umm al-Banin fears for her life and lets the caliph have the coffer. He orders his servants to dig a deep well and drown the coffer, al-Yamman remaining silent throughout. By choosing to die a silent death, al-Yamman, in Adam’s words, emerges as “a martyr to love.”³³⁵ He “died as die the heroes of unwritten stories.”³³⁶

At this point, Adam recognizes that the reader of al-Yamman’s story may wonder “why did Waddah remain silent in his coffer; why didn’t he call out and ask for mercy?”³³⁷ But Adam discards this question and takes issue with how it denies the victim’s right to their own silence. It reminds him of another similar question posed in Palestinian novelist Ghassān Kanafānī’s 1962 novella *Rijāl fī al-shams* (*Men in the Sun*, 1999). It is the question of, why, as they were about to meet their imminent death, the three Palestinians did not bang on the side of the tank? For his part, Adam announces that he, “unlike Kanafani, will never ask him [al-Yamman] that wretched, “Why?”³³⁸

³³³ Ibid., 55. The text in Arabic: "أرادت أن يتغزل بها الشعراء"

³³⁴ Ibid., 79. The text in Arabic: "أن الخليفة شم رائحة الخيانة."

³³⁵ Ibid., 88.

³³⁶ Ibid., 31. The text in Arabic: "فيموت كما يموت أبطال الحكايات التي لم تكتب."

³³⁷ Ibid., 82. The text in Arabic: "لماذا صمت الوضاح في الصندوق، ولم يصرخ طالبا الرحمة؟"

³³⁸ Ibid., 31. The text in Arabic: "ولن أسأله مثلما فعل كنفاني تلك اللعينة."

In a filmic adaptation of the same novel titled *Al-Makhdūn* (*The Dupes*, 1972), Egyptian director Tawfiq Sālih tweaked the ending and gave the three Palestinians agency by letting them bang for their life. For his part, Adam asserts that “in both mediums, the banging is meaningless” because, as he puts it, “the real question is not the silence of the Palestinians but the deafness of the world to their cries.”³³⁹

In fact, Adam takes his defense of the victim’s self-imposed silence even further by suggesting it is a sign of strength. As Adam puts it, it is the caliph’s urge to kill al-Yamman that constitutes an act of weakness, because “when he [the caliph] tries to kill a story, he turns into a minor character within it and loses his power and freedom of action.”³⁴⁰ For his part, al-Yamman responds by remaining silent and “it is here, at the moment of its killing, that the story will claim its victory.”³⁴¹

By recounting al-Yamman’s story, Adam, Refqa Abu-Remaileh argues, “strives to write from the perspective of the silent.”³⁴² I would take this further and argue that Adam is defending his own silence about his own traumas prior to the point where he decides to start writing his memoir.

From Metaphor to Memoir

As we read on, we are told that three recent encounters put Adam in a “savage rage that overwhelmed [his] being” and forced him to abandon his ongoing novel on Waddah al-

³³⁹ Ibid., 30-31. The text in Arabic: "لكن في الرواية و الفيلم تساوى القرع مع عدمه...وبذا، يصير السؤال الحقيقي ليس عن خرس الفلسطينيين بل عن صمم العالم عن سماع صراخهم."

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 84, The text in Arabic: "لكنه حين يصل إلى محاولة قتل الحكاية، فإنه يصير شخصية ثانوية فيها، ويفقد حيله وحيلته."

³⁴¹ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "وهنا، سوف تنتصر القصة لحظة قتلها."

³⁴² Abu-Remaileh, “Novel as Contrapuntal Reading,” 302.

Yamman.³⁴³ The first takes place inside a movie theatre in New York, where Adam is invited by Israeli director Chaim Zilbermann, a friend of Adam's and a frequent visitor to his *falafel* restaurant, to watch the debut screening of the latter's new documentary film, *Intersecting Glances*. The film, he writes:

presented a forgery of the truth about Dalia and her friends and made no reference to my grandmother's village of Yibna—as would be proper for a village whose inhabitants were brutally expelled in 1948—my soul exploded and my memory burst open.³⁴⁴

As he witnesses the story “being torn to pieces”, Adam is even more irritated to spot Elias Khoury among the audience.³⁴⁵ We learn that Adam is critical of Khoury's literary writing, and especially his *Nakbah*-themed *Bāb al-shams*, because it is not historically accurate. He is especially bothered by how Khoury identifies himself “as an expert on the story of Palestine,” and also by his “lying.”³⁴⁶ Khoury refers to this tension in his own foreword to the novel and recounts how in an earlier heated encounter with Adam, he “screamed in Adam's face” declaring that he had “written a story, not a history.”³⁴⁷ Following the film screening, Adam fights with both Zilbermann and Khoury and leaves the theatre.

This infuriating encounter is exacerbated by another event which happens three days prior to this screening. Blind Ma'moun, a former resident of the Lydda ghetto and a former father figure for Adam, lands in New York from Cairo to deliver a lecture on the theme of silence in modern Palestinian literature. He runs into Adam by coincidence and they engage in a conversation which puts the latter into “a limp rag of confusion and grief” and tears his “soul apart.”³⁴⁸

³⁴³ Khoury, *My Name*, 24. The text in Arabic: “غضب وحشي استحوذ على كياني.”

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 166. The text in Arabic: “و حين التقت هذه التساؤلات بالفيلم الذي زور حقيقة دالية وأصدقائها، ولم يلتفت إلي بيئة، وهي قرية جدتي، كما يلقى بقرية طرد سكانها بوحشية عام ١٩٤٨، انفجرت روعي وسالت ذاكرتي!”

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 24. The text in Arabic: “كيف تحولت قصة دالية صديقتي إلى أشلاء.”

³⁴⁶ Ibid. The text in Arabic: “ويقدم نفسه بوصفه خبيراً في الحكاية الفلسطينية.”

³⁴⁷ Ibid., 14. The text in Arabic: “فأنا لم أكتب تاريخاً بل كتبت قصة.”

³⁴⁸ Ibid., 117. The text in Arabic: “حولني إلى خرقة مبللة بالحيرة والأسى، ومزق روعي.”

Ma'moun had lived in a room adjacent to the house of Manal, Adam's mother, in the Lydda ghetto following the town's fall in July 1948, emerging as a father figure for the orphaned Adam. Eventually, Ma'moun leaves to Egypt where he pursues graduate studies in literature. When he meets Adam in New York decades later, Ma'moun decenters Adam's story in two major ways: First, by revealing that he has tried to write Adam's story as the "first son of the ghetto" a few times but failed, which troubles Adam and makes him feel he is "no more than a story that deserved to find a writer."³⁴⁹

Secondly, Ma'moun reveals to Adam that he is not Manal's real son, and that Ma'moun found him "lying . . . under an olive tree, on the breast of a dead woman" as Lydda residents stormed out of their towns on the eve of the *Nakbah*.³⁵⁰ Ma'moun picked up the newborn and carried him to Lydda's main hospital, and Manal, a nurse at Lydda hospital at the time, decided that Adam "would be her son."³⁵¹ At this point, Adam gathers that the story of his so-called martyred father, Hassan Dannoun, is also false. At the age of almost 50, Adam finds that both his parents are not real. The news retraumatizes him and he announces the following:

Suddenly, at the end of my life, I find out that I'm not me and that the "I" that I see in others' mirrors has turned to shards.³⁵²

It is a rupture that further shatters his already assaulted self:

I felt as though a thunderbolt had split me in two, and no longer knew who I was³⁵³.

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 118, The text in Arabic: "لم أكن بالنسبة إلى مأمون سوى حكاية تستحق أن تجد من يكتبها."

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 119, The text in Arabic: "رأني مرميا تحت شجرة زيتون على صدر امرأة ميتة."

³⁵¹ Ibid., 120, The text in Arabic: "وقالت أنني سأكون أبنها."

³⁵² Ibid., 119, The text in Arabic: "فجأة وأنا في نهاية العمر، أكتشف أنني لست أنا، و أن هذه الأنا التي أراها في مرايا الآخرين صارت شظايا."

³⁵³ Ibid., 130, The text in Arabic: "سوف أشعر أن صاعقة قسمتني إلى نصفين، وأنني لم أعد أدري من أكون."

now I discover that I've lived my whole life inside a coffer of fear, which, in order to escape, I must not just write back, but break.³⁵⁸

Adam's "escape" as a reaction to trauma is suggestive of how Caruth describes "the trauma of an accident, its very unconsciousness" as "borne by an act of departure." According to Caruth, "it is a departure that, in the full force of its historicity, remains at the same time in some sense absolutely opaque" but it is "this very opacity [that] generates the surprising force of a knowledge."³⁵⁹

Adamant to not "write back, but break," Adam announces his narrative intention as follows:

instead of killing memory with metaphor . . . I shall transform it, as I write it, into a corpse made out of words.³⁶⁰

The rest of the text then becomes this "corpse made out of words" which helps Adam work through and forget his traumas. Like Khalil in *Gate of the Sun*, Adam is the son of postmemory whose complex trauma is in large part inherited from the first-generation of Palestinians. His memoir, a huge chunk of which is centered on the early years of the Lydda ghetto, is an epitome of what Hirsch describes as "intergenerational acts of transfer," through which second-generation Palestinians preserve the 1948 traumatic memory but also actively mediate its legacy.³⁶¹ Like Khalil, he draws on a range of "stories, images, and behaviors" which according to Hirsch enable children of postmemory to carry out postmemorial work and mediate their inherited traumatic memories.

³⁵⁸ Ibid., 100. The text in Arabic: "لكنني أكتشف الآن أنني عشت طوال حياتي في صندوق الخوف، وعلي كي أخرج من الصندوق أن أكسره، لا أن أكتبه فقط."

³⁵⁹ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 22.

³⁶⁰ Khoury, *My Name*, 100. The text in Arabic: "وبدل قتل الذاكرة بالاستعارة، كما حاولت أن أفعل من خلال عملي الروائي المجهد عن وضاح اليمن، سوف أكتبها محولا إياها جثة من كلمات."

³⁶¹ Hirsch, "The Generation," 104.

I argue that by embarking on this memoir project, Adam shows loyalty to the first generation's trauma in as much as he expresses his readiness to transform his traumatic memory into narrative memory, and thus begin working through his suppressed trauma(s).

The next section looks at the first component of Adam's writing project, i.e. his postmemorial remembrances, as he conceives his way to forgetfulness, namely his recollections of the Lydda ghetto and the ensuing traumatization of its residents.

Narrativizing the Fall of Lydda

On 9 July 1948, the Israeli army advanced towards the neighboring Palestinian towns of Lydda and Ramle and over a three-day period heavily bombed both towns from land and air. According to Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, the conquest of both cities was part of Operation Dani, an offensive ordered by then prime minister David-Ben Gurion during the ten-day long fighting between Arab and Israeli armies in early to mid-July.³⁶² As it launched their attacks on Lydda and Ramle, the Israeli battalion was met with local resistance but over the next hours, "it became evident that Lydda would surrender."³⁶³ By the afternoon of 12 July, Israeli forces had taken control of the town.³⁶⁴ For their part, Arab fighters continued to resist Israel's advance on Lydda, but their "renewed resistance was quickly and brutally crushed, costing the lives of many innocent civilians."³⁶⁵

³⁶² Spiro Muanayyar, with an introduction by Walid Khalidi, "The Fall of Lydda," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 27, no.4 (Summer 1998): 80, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2538132>.

³⁶³ Arnon Golan, "Lydda and Ramle: From Palestinian-Arab to Israeli Towns, 1948-67," *Middle Eastern Studies* 39, no.4. (2003): 124, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263200412331301817>.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 25.

³⁶⁵ Ibid.

The attack on Lydda served two important strategic goals. In his article, “Lydda and Ramle: from Palestinian-Arab to Israeli towns,” Arnon Golan argues that Israel’s first objective was to “free Jewish Jerusalem and its connecting route to the coastal plain from pressure by the Jordanian Arab Legion and by semi-regular Egyptian and Palestinian forces” and secondly, to “eliminate the threat of a possible Jordanian attack on the Tel Aviv region.”³⁶⁶

The fall of Lydda was followed by the brutal expulsion of its residents.³⁶⁷ Israeli historian Benny Morris estimates the expulsion of Lydda at “one-tenth of the Arab exodus from Palestine” which makes it “the largest operation of its kind in the first Israeli-Arab war.”³⁶⁸ This figure is confirmed by Khalidi, who asserts that out of the 50,000 inhabitants of Lydda, around 49,000 “were forcefully expelled” after the town’s fall.³⁶⁹ This figure includes the thousands of refugees who wound up in Lydda after the fall of Jaffa, and who upon their arrival in Ramle and Lydda, “lived in makeshift housing they set up in open areas.”³⁷⁰

Morris argues that the expulsion of Lydda residents was a result of psychological warfare, adding that the military operations that targeted Lydda “were designed to induce civilian panic and flight-as a means of precipitating military collapse and possibly also as an end in itself.”³⁷¹ He argues that the systematic expulsion of Lydda residents is confirmed by two messages sent by Operation Dani HQ to the IDF General Staff on the evening of 10 July: the first announcing “a general and considerable [civilian] flight from Ramle” and the second proclaiming “that there is great value in continuing the bombing” and asking for “possibilities

³⁶⁶ Ibid., 24.

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 25.

³⁶⁸ Benny Morris, “Operation Dani and the Palestinian Exodus from Lydda and Ramle in 1948,” *Middle East Journal* 40, no. 1 (1986): 82, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/4327250>.

³⁶⁹ Muanyar, “The Fall of Lydda,” 80.

³⁷⁰ Golan, “Lydda and Ramle,” 124.

³⁷¹ Morris, “Operation Dani,” 86.

of aerial bombardment of Ramle now."³⁷² To further facilitate the expulsion of Lydda residents, Israeli forces embarked on a "largescale massacre" that began on the afternoon of July 12, accompanied by a range of terrorizing tactics.³⁷³

It is the fall of Lydda and its emergence as a painful traumatic experience in Palestinian collective memory that sits at the heart of Adam's memoir. He opens his account on the eve of Lydda's fall on 12 July 1948 and discloses how the Israeli 89th brigade "ordered the inhabitants to leave their houses and the refugees who had come to Lydda their makeshift camps and pointed to the road leading to Ramallah."³⁷⁴ He captures the terror that characterized these expulsions, how Israeli soldiers "shouted as they fired over their hands," how they "banged on the doors of the houses brandishing their weapons and ordering people to leave with nothing but the clothes on their backs."³⁷⁵

As he sketches this general picture of Lydda, Adam announces as his aim the drawing of the "map of pain" that "made its home" in the fallen city on and after the *Nakbah* by focusing on his own Sakna quarter.³⁷⁶ To realize his mapping project, he relies on fragments of stories he had heard from his own mother as well as other ghetto residents and weaves them together to "write a story full of bloody stains and memory gaps."³⁷⁷ I argue that Adam's memoir details the land-owner-turned-ghettoized-subject trauma as experienced by the residents of Lydda after the *Nakbah*.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid., 94.

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 318. The text in Arabic: "فصاروا يطلقون النار على كل شيء. أمروا السكان بالخروج من بيوتهم واللاجئين إلى اللد بالخروج من مخيماتهم العشوائية، وأشاروا إلى الطريق الموصل إلى رام الله."

³⁷⁵ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "كانوا يصرخون، وهم يطلقون النار فوق الرؤوس. يقرعون أبواب البيوت شاهرين سلاحهم ويأمرون الناس بالخروج بثيابهم."

³⁷⁶ Ibid., 288. The text in Arabic: "وأنا أحاول أن أرسم خريطة الألم، قبل أن أدخل في ذاكرة الألم الذي استوطن مدينتي التي غادرتها صغيرا."

³⁷⁷ Ibid., 273. The text in Arabic: "وأن أكتب حكاية مليئة ببقع الدم وثقوب الذاكرة."

The first three days immediately following the *Nakbah*, those of the expulsion and ensuing massacre, are largely absent from Adam's retelling. He attributes this absence to the silence of his mother and other *Nakbah* survivors:

It was the same with everyone, as if the victims had decided unconsciously that the words could not be spoken and that their only means to survive in the abyss of death was silence.³⁷⁸

Overwhelmed by their experiences as victims-witnesses--having witnessed both the fall of the city, the ensuing massacre and dispossession, and remained alive--Manal and fellow Lydda residents go through the post-trauma incubation period during which no post-trauma symptoms can be traced. For his part, Adam defends and endorses their silence:

they wanted to forget them [these tales], and that is their right, for how is a person supposed to carry his corpse on his back while continuing to live an ordinary life?³⁷⁹

But whilst early trauma theorists saw this incubation period or delayed enunciation as constitutive of a certain failure on the part of the traumatized individual, recent interventions in trauma theory suggest that this delay—the period of silence that follows the traumatic event—does not suggest passivity on the part of the individual, but rather proves that “a person is always actively engaging their circumstances and working on managing unpredictable occurrences of stimuli.”³⁸⁰ As such, traumatic symptoms ranging from nightmares to repetitions must be reconsidered as “varying emotional, intellectual, social, and material ways of coping with distressing circumstances of livelihood.”³⁸¹

³⁷⁸ Ibid., 314. The text in Arabic: "و هذا ليس حال أمي وحدها، بل حال الجميع، كأن الضحايا قرروا بشكل لا واع أن الكلام لا يستطيع أن يروي، وأن وسيلتهم الوحيدة للعيش في حضيض الموت هي الصمت."

³⁷⁹ Ibid., 319. The text in Arabic: "ثم أنهم أرادوا نسيانها، وهذا حقهم، إذ كيف يستطيع الإنسان أن يحمل جثته على ظهره ويتابع حياته العادية؟"

³⁸⁰ Nikro, "Researching Trauma," 21-22.

³⁸¹ Ibid., 20.

It is 72 hours after the massacre that the traumatized Lydda residents begin to comprehend the *Nakbah*'s shattering experience and start reacting to it. As they narrate their stories to Adam, their accounts come out unordered and mixed up, marred by a forgetfulness that must have helped them work through the trauma and go on with their lives. Adam justifies that the jumbled-up memories are due to the "victims' attempt to adapt themselves to the new reality by viewing the succession of tragic events through the third eye, which sees only what a person can bear to see."³⁸²

At this point in the text, Adam begins to chart the "map" of collective trauma that transpires in the lives of Lydda residents after the *Nakbah*. Guided by Hirsch's concept of postmemory, I argue that Adam's narrativization of the fall of Lydda and the ensuing traumatization of its residents constitutes postmemorial work: He uses the resources that were passed down to him, mainly stories told by his mother as well as other survivors of the Lydda massacre, to tap into and narrate his inherited trauma. As son of postmemory, he tries to piece together the unordered and mixed up stories and transform them into a coherent narrative.

This collective trauma begins when the remaining Lydda residents, around 500 in total, woke up "in fear" after the "three days of random killing that they called "the massacre.""³⁸³

Soon after, the Israeli soldiers ordered the residents to congregate in the courtyard of the town's Great Mosque, at which point they emerged as "phantoms walking sluggishly towards the assembly point stuck close to one another, like frightened chickens."³⁸⁴

³⁸² Khoury, *My Name*, 252. The text in Arabic: "أعتقد أن تعدد الروايات لا يعود فقط إلى حقيقة أنها لم تكتب، بل يعود أساساً إلى محاولة الضحية التأقلم مع واقعها الجديد، عبر النظر إلى الأحداث المأسوية المتلاحقة بالعين الثالثة، التي لا ترى إلا ما يستطيع الإنسان تحمل رؤيته."

³⁸³ Ibid., 201. The text in Arabic: "استفاق الناس بالخوف، فبعد ثلاثة أيام من القتل العشوائي الذي أطلقوا عليه اسم المذبحة، ناموا ليلتهم الأولى وسط سكون غريب."

³⁸⁴ Ibid., 203. The text in Arabic: "الأشباح التي كانت تمشي متناقلة إلى مكان التجمع، التصق بعضها ببعض كالذجاج المذعور."

That they walked like “phantoms” and “frightened chickens” is indicative of the fear they experienced following this traumatizing experience. It is the fact that they witness the fall of Lydda and survive it that troubles them the most, culminating in what Caruth describes of post-trauma living “as the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival.”³⁸⁵

In the courtyard, Lydda’s last surviving residents are given a sunbath, itself a famous humiliating and degrading Israeli tactic. It is as their bodies “sway discreetly under the leaden July sun” that they slowly begin to react to their fresh trauma.³⁸⁶

Suddenly, an old woman passes out, and a young Palestinian boy by the name of Mufid Shahada rushes to her side. He walks to the barbed wire to ask the Israeli soldiers for permission to bring water from the nearby ablutions tank, which he is refused. It is then that the congregating women “wail.” In her account of the incident, Manal describes the sound that emerged as:

A sort of moaning coming from I don’t know where. And then suddenly, dear, I swear I don’t know how, the moaning started coming from me too without me realizing.³⁸⁷

The wailing here is an epitome of what Caruth says of trauma as “the moving and sorrowful voice that cries out, a voice that is paradoxically released *through the wound*.”³⁸⁸

³⁸⁵ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 7.

³⁸⁶ Khoury, *My Name*, 221. The text in Arabic: "الأجساد التي كانت تتمايل بخفر، تحت شمس تموز الرصاصية."

³⁸⁷ Ibid., 222. The text in Arabic: p.218. صار الأنين يطلع "إشي مثل الأنين إجا مدري من فين، وفجأة يا إبنني و الله بعرفش كيف، صار الأنين يطلع مني من دون ما أحس."

³⁸⁸ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 2.

Another reaction to the *Nakbah* trauma is that of temporary madness. As they stand in the courtyard, the residents are suddenly approached by Israeli soldiers who assemble a group of thirty men in their early twenties, and put them in a lorry which leaves soon afterwards, at which point a woman exclaims that the Israelis are “taking them to their death.”³⁸⁹ Upon hearing those words, another woman is suddenly “seized by a fit of madness.” She “lift[s] her child up high and start[s] dancing.”³⁹⁰ When she gathers herself together, the woman reveals that her son, Hamid, was among the group who just departed:

My husband was killed at the door of the mosque and left me the boy and the little girl. They’ve taken the boy to kill him, so what am I supposed to do? They should kill me too and get it over with.³⁹¹

Beyond the aforementioned responses to trauma, the text is filled with stories of elderly Palestinians who are unable to fathom that they both witnessed and survived the *Nakbah*, and so become reclusive. As such, they hide in different corners of the city, only to be found by the ghetto’s residents days after the *Nakbah*. This is the case with the “Old Woman of the Grave” whom the ghetto men find as they roam the cemetery later on in the novel. The woman had survived the Lydda’s *Nakbah* and spent the days following Lydda’s fall hiding in the cemetery. She “never stopped yawning.”³⁹² She was too afraid to fall sleep, fearing that as soon as she did, “death would sneak into her slumbers and carry her off.”³⁹³ It is not literal death that the woman fears, rather it is the possibility that her dream may repetitively take her back to the site of trauma that terrorizes her.

³⁸⁹ Khoury, *My Name*, 229. The text in Arabic: "أخدينهم على الموت."

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 230. The text in Arabic: "قالت منال إن المرأة أصيبت بمس من الجنون، رفعت طفلتها إلى الأعلى وبدأت ترقص."

³⁹¹ Ibid., 231. The text in Arabic: "زوجي محمود انقفل على باب الجامع، وتركلي الصبي والبنية، أخذوا الصبي يقتلوه، وأنا إيش أسوي، يقتلونني خلص."

³⁹² Ibid., 267. The text in Arabic: "إنها كانت لا تتوقف عن التثاؤب."

³⁹³ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "يبدو أنها كانت تخاف من النوم، لأنها اعتقدت أن الموت سيتسلل إلى نومها ويخطفها."

In his aforementioned account of the conquest of Lydda, Benny Morris writes that after the fall of Lydda, the remaining residents were “concentrated in a few restricted areas; placed under curfew and military government; and maintained on a bare level of subsistence by the Israeli authorities.”³⁹⁴ This post-*Nakbah* ghettoization of Lydda is painstakingly captured in Adam’s memoir. Just when they are about to recover “from their shock” over the *Nakbah*-induced trauma, Lydda residents are retraumatized by the fact that their Sakna quarter was now “fenced with barbed wire and had a single gate, guarded by three soldiers.”³⁹⁵ They realize that “this ghetto was now their home.”³⁹⁶ It is at this point that they discover “that their disaster had no bottom to hit.”³⁹⁷

When they first hear the word “ghetto” from the Israeli soldiers, the quarter residents think the word to mean “the Palestinian quarter,” or “the quarter of the Arabs.”³⁹⁸ It is 18-year-old Ma’moun who proceeds to explain its meaning to them, saying that ghettos refer to “the Jewish districts in Europe.”³⁹⁹ For their part, the “ghetto” residents meet their new fate with a combination of confusion and disbelief and the following conversation ensues:

“You’re telling me we’re Jews now?” Manal asked him [Ma’moun] naively.
 “Impossible. God forbid! We’re Muslims.”
 “And Christians,” added Illiyya.
 “Listen, guys,” said Ma’moun. “These people knew nothing. They think they’re in Europe. They’ve come and they’ve brought the ghetto with them so they can put us in it.”⁴⁰⁰

³⁹⁴ Morris, “Operation Dani,” 109.

³⁹⁵ Khoury, *My Name*, 322. The text in Arabic: “مستطيل صغير مسيح له بوابة واحدة يحرسها ثلاثة جنود.”

³⁹⁶ Ibid. The text in Arabic: “وقد تحولوا إلى سكان هذا الغيتو.”

³⁹⁷ Ibid., 304. The text in Arabic: “كارتتهم كانت بلا قعر.”

³⁹⁸ Ibid., 322. The text in Arabic: “حي الفلسطينيين، أو حي العرب.”

³⁹⁹ Ibid. The text in Arabic: “الغيتو هو أسم أحياء اليهود في أوروبا.”

⁴⁰⁰ Ibid., 323. The text in Arabic: “”يعني إحنا صرنا يهود؟” قالت منال بسذاجة. “مستحيل، أعوذ بالله إحنا مسلمين.” “ومسيحيين.” أضاف إيليا، “اسمعوا يا جماعة، هذول الناس بعرفوش إشي، فاكرين حالهم بأوروبا، وجايين وجايين معاهم الغيتو حتى يحطونا فيه،” قال مأمون.”

It is within the fences of this imported ghetto that the inhabitants are now supposed to organize their existence.

Lydda Residents as Present-absentees

By late 1948, the Jewish Agency, an Israeli organization tasked with resettling new immigrants into Israel, was receiving Jewish settlers from Eastern Europe and resettling them into the towns of Lydda and Ramle.⁴⁰¹ According to Arnon Golan, incoming Jewish settlers who had previous experience in farming were allowed to “start cultivating the extensive agricultural land” of Lydda and Ramle, a vast expanse of 59,000 dunams.⁴⁰²

Towards that end, there was an urgent need to ensure Israeli dominance over Lydda’s agricultural land, and especially its olive and citrus groves. This was finally realized with the Israeli Knesset’s passing of the Absentee Property (also known as Absentee Property Law or Land Acquisition Law (LAL) law) in March 1950. This new legislation defined an ‘absentee’ as:

every Israeli citizen who left his regular abode in Israel a) to a place outside Israel before 1948 or b) for a place in Israel which was at that time occupied by forces which sought to prevent the establishment of the State of Israel or fought against it after its establishment. Thus the internal refugees who fled to villages in upper Galilee or to Nazareth before these were conquered are defined as absentees though they were in the state and were legal citizens.⁴⁰³

This legislation then immediately translated the remaining residents, many of whom were internal refugees, into present absentees. This meant that even Palestinians who had

⁴⁰¹ Golan, “Lydda and Ramle,” 125.

⁴⁰² Ibid., 126.

⁴⁰³ Hillel Cohen, “The Internal Refugees in the State of Israel; Israeli Citizens, Palestinian Refugees,” *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics, and Culture* 9, no.2 (July 2002): 45, <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=bsu&AN=7455373&site=ehost-live>.

remained within their cities following the institutionalization of the Zionist project and thus had a “physical presence in the country” were now “legally considered as absentees and their property . . . taken from them and transferred to the Custodian of Absentee Property.”⁴⁰⁴ Furthermore, these present-absentees were not allowed to appeal to the Supreme Court nor claim “that leaving their residence was temporary.”⁴⁰⁵

This painful shift in the identity of Lydda’s remaining residents from land-owners to ghettoized subjects and then present-absentees is also captured in Adam’s memoir.

The story begins when the ghetto’s military governor, Captain Moshe, announces a set of orders to organize ghetto life: he prohibits the residents’ passage through the gate without permission and informs the inhabitants of their responsibility to secure water and food for themselves. He also forms a Public Ghetto Committee, comprising local residents, and tasks them with running a census and organizing life in the ghetto.

For its part, the Public Ghetto Committee enters into negotiations with Captain Moshe and asks to be granted access to the olive and citrus groves owned by Lydda residents. They hope to be able to harvest their crops and live off the land. For his part, Moshe denies them their request, explaining that Lydda residents no longer own these groves because “the land had become the property of the state.”⁴⁰⁶ He informs them of their new identity by saying:

you’re ghosts . . . I believe you are going to be called, legally speaking, ‘present absentees.’⁴⁰⁷

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁰⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁶ Khoury, *My Name*, 341. The text in Arabic: "أراضي المدينة صارت في عهدة الدولة."

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "كأنكم أشباح..أعتقد أن اسمكم القانوني سيكون الغائبون-الحاضرون."

In her article “Presence and Absence in ‘Abandoned’ Palestinian Villages,” Rona Sela probes the Israeli archives to trace how villages that were uprooted or destroyed in Jaffa, Acre and Tiberius “were gradually erased from the Israeli map after the establishment of the State of Israel.”⁴⁰⁸ Israel’s aim, she writes, was “to wipe them [these villages] from the collective consciousness in Israel.”⁴⁰⁹ That said, the Israeli state still took photos of these abandoned villages to keep record of the lands that now came under its ownership.

Sela unearths the following irony: how in capturing an uprooted space emptied of its Palestinianness, those photographs ended up stressing the absented Palestinian presence. She cites as an example a set of photos that document the resettlement of Jewish immigrants in Jaffa, Acre and Tiberius in the late 1940s and early 1950s. She argues that these photos hint at “two ethnic and geographic characteristics, each different from the other, [and] combined into a new reality.”⁴¹⁰ In capturing European immigrants “dressed in clothes from their country of origin,” and standing against a Palestinian landscape, these photos show the “proximity of different ethnic and architectural characteristics in the same photograph,” thus revealing “who was part of the land and absent.”⁴¹¹ Sela concludes that “the photographs turn the missing into the visible, the absent into the present [and] the forgotten into spokesmen for memory.”⁴¹²

Following the same line of thought, the post-1948 categorization of the remaining Lydda residents as absentees on their own land was soon challenged by the fact that Israel had to rely on Lydda’s residents to manage the food supply for its incoming settler community.⁴¹³

⁴⁰⁸ Rona Sela, “Presence and Absence in ‘Abandoned’ Palestinian Villages,” *History of Photography* 33, no.1 (2009): 71, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03087290802582970>.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid., 72.

⁴¹⁰ Ibid., 76.

⁴¹¹ Ibid., 79.

⁴¹² Ibid.

⁴¹³ Golan, “Lydda and Ramle,” 126.

This tension between the institutionalized absence of the Palestinian and their vital presence is portrayed in Adam's memoir. He recounts how Lydda was filling up with Jewish settlers from eastern Europe soon after the *Nakbah* and he speaks of the subsequent need for Palestinian laborers to assist in managing the city's food supply by working in the olive and citrus groves. The Lydda ghetto resident is now shattered by the fact that he must "work as a laborer on his own land" and to also provide food for the enemy.⁴¹⁴ This traumatizing experience was not exclusive to Lydda, as Adam refers to another nearby ghetto, which was home to another 500 residents, and comprised "men who worked on the railway, along with their families."⁴¹⁵ He adds that these railway workers were allowed to stay in the ghetto "because Israel needed to have the trains working."⁴¹⁶

Just like the out-of-space Jewish settlers of the photos mentioned above, Lydda's newly arrived settlers do not fit with the Palestinian landscape, and it is the very Palestinian laborer—rendered absent by Israeli legislation—who is called on to manage Israeli space. It is this very ironic reality that renders the present-absentee, present.

Violating the Human Body

Also included in Adam's mapping of trauma is the violation of the human body during and after the fall of Lydda. As they lived within their new ghetto borders, the Lydda residents were unaware that hundreds of disintegrating bodies, victims of the massacre that occurred just days earlier, lay behind these fences. It is only when the ghetto's men leave the quarter once to

⁴¹⁴ Khoury, *My Name.*, 355. The text in Arabic: "أن يشتغل عاملا في أرض البيرة التي يملكها."

⁴¹⁵ Ibid., 359. The text in Arabic: "وهو يتألف من الرجال الذين يعملون في السكة الحديدية مع أفراد عائلاتهم."

⁴¹⁶ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "وقد تقرر إبقاء هؤلاء بسبب حاجة إسرائيل إلى تشغيل القطارات."

bury a fallen martyr, and a second time to fetch food and other provisions, that they come across this gruesome sight. The Lydda that emerges in Adam's account is that of a city captured by death in every corner.

To map out this bodily harm, Adam juxtaposes accounts by ghetto residents relying for the most part on a long testimony by Murad al-Alami, a 70-year-old Palestinian and a Lydda ghetto survivor. Adam meets al-Alami in New York, and they quickly become friends. al-Alami had been tasked with the collection of Lydda's disintegrating corpses and proceeds to give his account of this gruesome task in seven consecutive scenes which are interwoven into Adam's memoir.

Like Adam, al-Alami suppressed his ghetto trauma and "erased Palestine" only to be "brought back to it by "old age.""⁴¹⁷ Now that he is "brought back" to his "erased Palestine," al-Alami will master the repetitions that can help them narrate his trauma and work it through. This is what Caruth means when she argues that repetitive re-enactments of the traumatic event that "haunt the victim" eventually help the traumatized realize "not only the reality of the violent event but also the reality of the way that its violence has not yet been fully known"⁴¹⁸

Now that he sits before Adam to recollect these traumatic scenes, al-Alami announces his readiness to narrativize his trauma. He can now safely exit his traumatic memory and "get away from its nightmares," which "paralyze" him.⁴¹⁹

⁴¹⁷ Ibid., 379. The text in Arabic: "محوت فلسطين، لكنها الكهولة، الكهولة تعيدك إلى الطفولة."

⁴¹⁸ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 6.

⁴¹⁹ Khoury, *My Name*, 368-369. The text in Arabic: "وأريد أن أنتهي منه بسرعة كي أخرج من كوابيسه التي تشلني."

The story begins when Captain Moshe tasks the men of the ghetto with “removing bodies from the streets and houses and burying them.”⁴²⁰ Moshe extends the leadership of the team to al-Alami, at the time a sixteen-year-old resident in the ghetto. Al-Alami recalls how the team began their work on Lydda’s Saladin Street. He captures the horrid scene in the following lines:

The bodies were strewn down the road, and by the end of the first day we’d got used to it. how can I put it? We’d learned how-to pick-up corpses without the limbs coming off.⁴²¹

As they carry out their task, they come across bodies that had “bloated and gone rigid” and were surrounded by “swarms of flies” to which they react with a mixture of disbelief and sobbing:⁴²²

I don’t know how it happened but we all started crying. We cried and sobbed and our bodies shook with fear.⁴²³

The next morning, the team is ordered to head to the main Lydda cemetery and “dig a trench twenty meters in length and five meters in width.”⁴²⁴ They are told to “throw the bodies” into the trench.⁴²⁵ It is what happens next that haunts al-Alami’s forever. The Israelis issue a “decree,” announcing that “the bodies, which had begun to disintegrate under the sun of death, should be burnt.”⁴²⁶ Al-Alami gives a detail description of the burning scene:

Two Israeli soldiers told us to gather the scattered parts together again with the shovels and then one of them gave me a gallon can of kerosene and ordered me to splash it over the parts and the fire started and the air filled with thick black smoke, to the sound of the cracking of the fire. And we, my dear sir, had to wait while the ashes dispersed into the air and then gather the bones and bury them in a small hole.⁴²⁷

⁴²⁰ Ibid., 352. The text in Arabic: "مجموعتان لرفع الجثث من الشوارع والبيوت ودفنها."

⁴²¹ Ibid., 383. The text in Arabic: "كانت الجثث مرمية على الطريق، وبعد نهاية اليوم الأول تعودنا، كيف بدى أقولك، يعني صرنا نعرف كيف نحمل الجثة من دون ما نتفكك الأعضاء."

⁴²² Ibid., 382. The text in Arabic: "وفاجأتنا الجثث وأسراب الذباب. كانت جثث الناس مرمية في وسط الشارع وقد انتفخت وتخشبّت."

⁴²³ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "ولا أدري كيف اجتاحتنا البكاء. كنا نبكي وننشج وأجسامنا ترتعش بالخوف."

⁴²⁴ Ibid., 384. The text in Arabic: "وطلب منا حفر خندق طوله عشرون مترا وعرضه خمسة أمتار."

⁴²⁵ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "ثم أمرونا برمي الجثث فيه."

⁴²⁶ Ibid., 365. The text in Arabic: "وهي لحظة تنفيذ القرار الإسرائيلي بإحراق الجثث التي تفسخت تحت شمس الموت."

⁴²⁷ Ibid., 412. The text in Arabic: "طلب منا الجنديان الإسرائيليان إعادة تجميع الأشلء التي تناثرت بعضها بالرغوش، ثم أعطاني أحدهما غالونا وأمرني برش الكاز على الأشلء، واشتعلت النار، وامتأل الجو بدخان كثيف أسود اللون، وسط أصوات فرقة النار. وكان علينا يا سيدي أن ننظر كي نبعث الرماد في الهواء، ونجمع وندفنها في حفرة صغيرة."

The event exceeds his ability at comprehension, thus escaping his consciousness. It is however the “smell” of the burning dead corpses that repetitively return to haunt him:

I’m seventy years old now and it still goes with me everywhere. Every morning I have to go out into the garden, even if it’s fifteen below zero. I go out to breathe in the air and get rid of the stench.⁴²⁸

With this horrifying scene, Adam’s account of post-*Nakbah* Lydda comes to an end. He writes that the ghetto’s fence was removed towards the end of 1949, except that the trauma remained. The ghetto wire “remained engraved on people’s hearts and the common name of the two Arab quarters.”⁴²⁹ Both the Sakna quarter and the neighboring ghetto of railroad workers “continues to be, to this day, “the Arab ghetto[s].”⁴³⁰

By narrativizing the post-1948 Lydda ghetto and its associated trauma, Adam exposes the collective trauma experienced by the remaining Lydda residents after the fall of the city. This narrativization of the 1948 *Nakbah* as experienced by Lydda residents-turned-ghettoized-subjects directly implicates the political stressors behind the trauma. Israel stands behind the conquest of Lydda, expelling and killing its residents, and actively ghettoizing those who stayed back.

By carrying out his postmemorial remembrances and putting forth a narrative of his inherited Lydda trauma, Adam contextualizes the first generation’s suffering during the *Nakbah*. He attests to what Ihab Saloul says of *Nakbah* stories as far from being “historical eyewitness account . . . but [rather] . . . memories of life trajectories that imagine what the

⁴²⁸ Ibid., 410. The text in Arabic: "هل تستطيع أن تتخيل معنى أن يبدأ صباحك برائحة الجثث المحترقة؟ صار عمري أكثر من سبعين سنة وهذه الرائحة ترافقتني، علي في كل صباح أن أخرج إلى الحديقة حتي لو كانت الحرارة ١٥ تحت الصفر، أخرج كي أنتشق الهواء و أبدد رائحتي."

⁴²⁹ Ibid., 419. The text in Arabic: "فالأسلاك ظلت محفورة في القلوب."

⁴³⁰ Ibid. The text in Arabic: "والحيان العربيان بقي أسمهما المتداول إلى أيامنا هو غيتو العرب."

catastrophe means to the speakers in their everyday of exile.”⁴³¹ The next section looks at the second component of Adam’s postmemorial work, namely his narrativization of his own personal trauma as a Palestinian-Israeli in post-*Nakbah* Lydda.

Revealing Adam’s Trauma

As he pens the story of the Lydda ghetto, Adam begins to open up about his own trauma as ghettoized subject, and subsequently as a Palestinian inside Lydda-turned-Lodd after the 1948 *Nakbah*. The narration of the Palestinian collective trauma discussed earlier puts him face to face with his own trauma:

I shouldn’t have left my life full of these holes and gaps that have turned today into besieging ghosts.⁴³²

The repetition that creeps on him in the form of “besieging ghosts” eventually helps him grasp his repressed trauma, and he is finally able to go from a traumatic, un-narrated memory, to a narrative memory. Thus, he moves from what LaCapra describes as “melancholia as a form of acting out” to “mourning” a form of working through.⁴³³

Fifty years after the experience of trauma, he is finally able to “recover” his “language.”⁴³⁴ I agree with Raef Zreik who argues that it is Adam’s silence, followed by the compulsion to repeat the earlier traumatic event, that eventually prepare him for his eventual narration of trauma. Zreik writes that “if words long for silence to recharge themselves with

⁴³¹ Saloul, *Catastrophe and Exile*, 177.

⁴³² Khoury, *My Name*, 176. The text in Arabic: "ما كان يجب أن أترك حياتي مليئة بهذه الثقوب والفجوات التي تحولت اليوم إلى أشباح تحاصرني."

⁴³³ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 65.

⁴³⁴ Khoury, *My Name*, 281. The text in Arabic: "كي أستعيد لغتي."

the meaning preceding their being, so does the meaning residing in silence.”⁴³⁵ Meaning, Zreik adds, “finds its ways to being only through circulation and repetition.”⁴³⁶

Adam first breaks his silence by narrating the story of the Lydda ghetto, and a second time when he decides to free himself from his self-imposed invisibility and begin exhibiting his own traumas. At this point in the text, he begins opening up about his early years as an “invisible child” and about the “journey of [his] life that had hidden itself under a magic cap of invisibility.”⁴³⁷

The first trauma Adam opens up about is that of his experience as an orphan. This traumatic experience is activated when Ma'moun meets Adam in New York and informs him that both his parents are not real. Adam reacts by taking refuge in temporary silence—and he subsequently loses “the capacity to speak.”⁴³⁸ Shortly after, he reveals his own silenced trauma as an orphan and we learn that Adam had “three fathers,” all of whom have “abandoned” him.⁴³⁹

His first father was his real “biological father,” whose wife, Adam’s biological mother, was found dead under a tree on the eve of *Nakbah*. This is the father whom Adam hardly knows anything about. His second father was the one Manal invented for him, a certain Hasan Dannoun who allegedly died during the 1948 *Nakbah* while defending the city of Lydda, and who “became familiar” to Adam “as a photograph hung on the wall.”⁴⁴⁰ Adam’s third father is the very person who decenters his story and re-traumatizes him,

⁴³⁵ Zreik, “Writing Silence,” 319.

⁴³⁶ Ibid.

⁴³⁷ Khoury, *My Name*, 102. The text in Arabic: "كيف أروي لها عن الولد اللامرئي الذي كنته، وعن رحلة عمري التي اختبأت في طاقية الإخفاء؟"

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 143.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 165.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid., 171. The text in Arabic: "فكان إنسانا حقيقيا، تألفت معه كصورة معلقة على الحائط."

namely Ma'moun Khudr. Ma'moun is a former resident of the Lydda ghetto who neighbored Manal and Adam for seven years after the *Nakbah*. He becomes the teacher of the ghetto and slowly emerges as a father figure to young Adam, before deciding to abandon Adam and Manal and leave to Cairo, thus compounding Adam's crisis. What devastates Adam even more is how during his U.S. encounter with Adam, Ma'moun treats Adam "not as the son he'd abandoned but as a story."⁴⁴¹

Beyond Adam's trauma as an orphan, there is his early exposure to the traumatic experience of ghettoization. He writes that he was the "the first child born to the ghetto so they had to call . . . [him] . . . Adam."⁴⁴² He was only-six months old when the ghetto was removed except that "the memory of the ghetto lives on" inside him.⁴⁴³ He even remembers its effect on his own mother whose face was "limned by grief," her "lips pressed together as though biting back the pain."⁴⁴⁴ He recalls how, when the ghetto was finally lifted, he spent years unable to fathom that it was no longer there. Whenever he crossed out of his Sakna quarter and "passed the places where the fence had been," he, along with other sons of the ghetto, "would bend [their] backs a little as though passing beneath the barbed wire." The traumatic legacy of the ghetto remains so intact that, "even blind Ma'moun would bend."⁴⁴⁵

Manal soon sends Adam off to the Lydda Arabic School and this is where his psychic fragmentation is aggravated. As he grapples with his identity as "son of the ghetto," Adam comes face to face with an even more troubling reality: that he was now a Palestinian in a pre-dominantly Jewish Israel.

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 143. The text in Arabic: "لم يعاملني بصفتي الابن الذي تخلى عنه، بل بصفتي حكاية."

⁴⁴² Ibid., 125. The text in Arabic: "قال إنني أول مولود للغيتو، لذا يجب أن يسموني آدم."

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 180. The text in Arabic:

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 297. The text in Arabic: "وجه مرسوم بالأسى... وشفقتان مطبقتان على ما يشبه عضه الوجع."

⁴⁴⁵ Ibid., 137. The text in Arabic: "كنا حين نمر أمام أمكنة السياج كي نعبّر إلى المدينة، ننحني قليلا، كأننا سنمر من تحت الأسلاك الشائكة. حتى مأمون الأعمى كان ينحني من دون أن يقول له أحد أن السياج كان هنا."

In his article, “Present Absentees: The Arab School Curriculum in Israel as a Tool for De-Educating Indigenous Palestinians,” Ismael Abu-Saad argues that after 1948, the Israeli state put together an Arab curriculum for its Arabic-speaking schools which was “designed to ‘de-educate’, or dispossess, indigenous Palestinians pupils of the knowledge of their own people and history.”⁴⁴⁶ He argues that this policy was an extension of Israel’s categorization of 1948 Palestinians in Israel as “present absentees.” According to Abu-Saad, this understanding of Palestinians in Israel as present-absentees was institutionalized in the 1953 Law of State Education which held that the general aim of the Israeli education system were: “to base education on the values of Jewish culture [and] on love of the homeland and loyalty to the state and the Jewish people.”⁴⁴⁷ He concludes that this aim “demonstrate[s] how Palestinian Arabs are ‘present’ as pupils in the school system, and yet ‘absent’ where the educational vision for the state is formulated.”⁴⁴⁸ Besides giving them only “superficial exposure to carefully screened and censored Arabic values and culture,” the education system, especially in Arab elementary schools, “maintains an emphasis on the Zionist national project.”⁴⁴⁹

Adam first encounters this harsh reality as a six-year old school boy at the Lydda Arabic School when he and his fellow students are taken to a military parade celebrating Israel’s Independence Day in May 1954. On their way to the parade, their teacher, Olga Naddaf explains that the parade is a “holiday for [their] new state” and instructs them to “respect the white-and-blue flag with a six-pointed star in the middle.”⁴⁵⁰ She even hits them

⁴⁴⁶ Ismael Abu-Saad, “Present Absentees: The Arab School Curriculum in Israel as a Tool for De-educating Indigenous Palestinians,” *Holy Land Studies: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 7, no.1 (May 2008): 17, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hls.0.0002>.

⁴⁴⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁴⁴⁸ Ibid. 17.

⁴⁴⁹ Ibid., 21, 24.

⁴⁵⁰ Khoury, *My Name*, 279. The text in Arabic: "وشرحت لنا أنه عيد دولتنا الجديدة، وأن علينا احترام العلم الأبيض والأزرق الذي تتوسطه النجمة السادسة.".

with a cane to make sure they abide by the instructions, at which point the children “cried.”⁴⁵¹ As soon as they reach the parade, the children are told to “stand quietly, wave the little flags, and not talk or be naughty.”⁴⁵²

At the site of celebration, Olga translates the “Tsahal Magen” that was scribbled on balloons that filled the sky as “The Israeli Army Protects.” Adam recalls how Olga cried as she translated those words, before looking at the ruined houses around and asking, “Where are the people?”⁴⁵³ Olga’s tears and the question that follows immediately fill this celebratory moment with tension: By pointing to the “ruined houses” she reveals the flip side of this ‘Independence’ day, that of the erased *Nakbah*.

For their part, the children react to this rather traumatizing incident—the instructions to respect the flag of their “new state” followed by Olga’s sudden tears--- by falling silent:

we felt obscurely that the teacher’s tears were translating them into another, unspoken, language; we fell into a silence that stayed with us throughout the return journey on the bus from al-Ramla to the ghetto.⁴⁵⁴

Adamant to free herself and her son from the harsh life of the ghetto, Manal eventually marries Abdallah al-Ashhal, a fellow Lydda resident, and relocates with him to Mount Carmel, sending Adam to school there. As soon as he gets there, Adam suffers pain on his shoulders, at which point Manal takes him to the doctor who describes Adam’s condition as that of “trauma.” The following conversation ensues between Adam and Manal:

⁴⁵¹ Ibid.

⁴⁵² Ibid. The text in Arabic: "أن نقف بهدوء ونلوح بالأعلام الصغيرة ولا نحكي أو نتشيطن."

⁴⁵³ Ibid., 280. The text in Arabic: "وقالت 'فين الناس؟'"

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid., 280-281. The text in Arabic: "وأحسننا بشكل غامض أن دموع المعلمة تترجم الكلام إلى لغة أخرى غير منطوقة، فحل علينا الصمت الذي رافقنا في رحلة العودة بالباص من الرملة إلى الغيتو."

I asked my mother what “trauma” meant and she didn’t know, but the word gave me a feeling of importance. I used to tell my schoolmates, when I pulled out of a game of leapfrog, that I had “a serious illness called trauma.” This led to “Trauma” becoming one of my names at school.⁴⁵⁵

In Mount Carmel, 15-year-old Adam is mistreated by his step-father, Abdallah al-Ashhal, and decides to leave Mount Carmel. He relocates to Haifa where he ends up working at a garage owned by a certain Jewish man by the name of Mr. Gabriel. It is there that he perfects his Hebrew and settles on suppressing his trauma. In other words, he finds his “own special way around the problem of acquiring a shadow in a country whose inhabitants had lost theirs” by “reinvent[ing]” himself.⁴⁵⁶

As such, he invents the following story: That he was the son of a certain Yitzhak, himself a survivor of the Warsaw Ghetto who escaped to Istanbul at the age of 17 and from there to Tel Aviv where he married the daughter of a Russian immigrant. Yitzhak died during the 1948 *Nakbah* and left Adam’s mother, Sarah, “alone with her madness, which was full of the nightmares of fear.”⁴⁵⁷ Adam uses the same details of his story—survivor of the ghetto, martyred father and a traumatized mother—except that he relays it as the story of a Jewish survivor of the Holocaust. In other words, he turns his story “upside down.”⁴⁵⁸

At other times, Adam would just keep things ambiguous by introducing himself as “son of the ghetto,” without mentioning the above story, and it would automatically be assumed that we was “son of a Warsaw Ghetto survivor.”⁴⁵⁹ Refqa Abu-Remaileh argues that

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid., 135. The text in Arabic: "سألت أمي ما معنى التروما، فلم تعرف. لكن الكلمة أعطتني شعورا بالأهمية، كنت أقول لزملائي: كنت أقول لزملائي: "عندما كنت أنسحب من لعبة القفز على الظهر، أنني لا أستطيع" لأنه عندي مرض خطير اسمه تروما." فصارت كلمة تروما أحد أسمائي في المدرسة."

⁴⁵⁶ Ibid., 271.

⁴⁵⁷ Ibid., 272.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ Ibid., 127.

by opening the “ghetto” to a “double meaning,” Adam appropriates a “Shakespearian riddle of mixed identities” adding that “Adam becomes the son of two ghettos at the same time: Lidd and Warsaw.”⁴⁶⁰ I would take this argument further and argue that Adam alleviates his new identity as a minority after the 1948 *Nakbah*, by attaching his story to the collective Holocaust trauma experienced by the new Jewish majority:

I was an Israeli like other Israelis. I didn’t conceal my Palestinian identity but kept it out of sight, in the ghetto where I was born.⁴⁶¹

Adam holds on to this ambiguity even after he leaves Haifa to the U.S. where he partners with his friend and restaurant-owner Nahum Hirschman. As he transforms himself into a U.S. immigrant, Adam further suppresses his trauma as son of the ghetto which “would become [his] secret story for [the next] fifty years.”⁴⁶²

Adam’s narration allows him to work through his trauma. He goes from announcing that: “Silence has been the distinguishing mark of my life.”⁴⁶³

To saying:

This is the story that I have attempted to tell through the voices of its heroes and victims. It is a story that I had to tell in order both to remember it and to forget it, as a past that has passed but does not want to pass.⁴⁶⁴

As he puts together his narrative memory, Adam is able to both “remember” the traumas of the past, but to also “forget” them.

⁴⁶⁰ Abu-Remaileh, “Novel as Contrapuntal Reading,” 301.

⁴⁶¹ Khoury, *My Name*, 108. The text in Arabic: "وكننت إسرائيليا كالإسرائيليين. لم أخف هويتي الفلسطينية، لكنني خبأتها في الغيتو الذي ولدت فيه."

⁴⁶² Ibid., 127. The text in Arabic: "ستتحول إلى حكايتي السرية طوال أكثر من خمسين سنة."

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 128. The text in Arabic: "الصمت كان عنوان حياتي."

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., 421. The text in Arabic: "هذه هي الحكاية التي حاولت أن أرويها على لسان أبطالها و ضحاياها، وكانت روايتي لها ضرورة كي أتذكرها وأنساها، بصفتها ماضيا يمضي ولا يريد أن يمضي."

Conclusion

According to LaCapra, a person's traumatic memory, in its repetitive flashbacks and nightmares, eventually allows them to "allay anxiety" by "locat[ing] a particular or specific thing that could be feared and thus enable one to find ways of eliminating or mastering that fear."⁴⁶⁵ As and when the traumatized subject locates this missing anxiety, they are able to comprehend their traumas, and are eventually able to narrate them.

As he writes his memoir and narrates the days of the Lydda ghetto, Adam is able to transcend his own silence and open up about his own psychic fragmentation. His narration of trauma helps him master the forgetfulness that he so needs to die peacefully. His memoir traces the collective trauma experienced by the residents of the Lydda ghetto following Israel's conquest of the city in July 1948. It follows the survivor-witnesses as they grapple with their new identities as residents of the ghetto and present-absentees concurrently.

⁴⁶⁵ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 57.

Conclusion

A shattering experience lies at the heart of all three novels that make up this project. In *The Kingdom of Strangers*, it is the Lebanese Civil War and its associated traumatic episodes of the Shatila massacre and the Second War of the Camps. In *Gate of the Sun*, it is the loss of the Galilee during the 1948 *Nakbah* as the beginning of a traumatic experience that continues in the refugee camps of Lebanon up till and including the Lebanese Civil War, and finally, in *Children of the Ghetto: My Name is Adam*, it is the fall of Lydda on the eve of the 1948 *Nakbah*, and the subsequent ghettoization of the city's Arab residents.

Each of these man-made disasters leaves the narrator-protagonist grappling with a trauma that escapes their immediate consciousness. Caruth describes this "trauma" as a "wound" in the psyche which can only be grasped through the proactive repetitions that follow the traumatic event. This compulsion to repeat the trauma eventually allows the protagonist to start to work it through, resulting in non-teleological and fragmented narratives. While all three novels are triggered by personal traumas, they quickly become repositories of collective traumas experienced by different Palestinian communities at different junctures of the 70-year-old Palestinian experience of dispossession; be it the traumas experienced by the Palestinian refugee community of Lebanon or those experienced by Palestinian residents of Lydda in present-day Israel.

The narratives that emerge can only partially accommodate and tend to the psychic wound. These are not textual spaces where protagonists are able to completely transcend their

traumas. Rather, our traumatized protagonists can only partially come to terms with their repressed memories, or free themselves from older, inherited traumas. Khalil, for example, is adamant to free up some space to better accommodate a continuing traumatic reality. Their trauma narratives allow them to arrive at their deaths (literally and figuratively) with a degree of fulfillment. That said, they can never entirely heal their traumas because the historical event that triggered these traumas remains a daily political reality.

But beyond their emergence as sites for the *acting out* and *working through* of traumatic experiences, all three novels serve a deeper purpose. As readers of these texts, we follow the three protagonists on their journeys from an incomprehensible traumatic event to an increased realization of its nuances and a subsequent masterfulness of active forgetting.

As we read through Khoury's trauma narratives, we become witnesses to the structural trauma that has characterized the Palestinian experience over the past seven decades. This is what LaCapra means when he writes of the potential role of post-traumatic writing as "relatively safe haven compared with actual traumatization," and a "means of bearing witness to . . . trauma."⁴⁶⁶ Khoury's reliance on history as a methodological tool that guides his re-enactment of Palestinian trauma, opens up this possibility. In other words, his reliance on the historical introduces the possibility of witnessing. He draws on "truth claims," which, as LaCapra argues, allows the literary text to "provide insight into phenomena . . . by offering a reading of a process or period, or by giving at least a plausible "feel" for experience."⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁶ LaCapra, *Writing History*, 105.

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 13.

Khoury arrives at this “feel for experience” by relying on oral history testimonials to write his trauma narratives. These real-life stories of individual Palestinian refugees and former ghetto residents function as blueprints for his Palestinian epics, allowing him to actively engage the circumstances of trauma. In so doing, Khoury achieves what Caruth describes as a “possibility of history” that results from literature.⁴⁶⁸

Beyond his contextualization of Palestinian trauma, Khoury follows in the footsteps of Edward Said by bringing together Palestinian and Jewish traumatic histories analogously. Like Said, he believes in the absolute necessity of discussing both traumatic experiences together and reveals how a de-contextualization of Jewish traumatic memory has caused the Palestinian trauma which continues to this day. Contextualizing both traumas, Said had incessantly argued, is a main pre-requisite for Palestinian-Israeli peace:

it has been impossible for Jews to understand the human tragedy caused the Arab Palestinians by Zionism; and it has been impossible for Arab Palestinians to see in Zionism anything except an ideology and a practice keeping them, and Israeli Jews, imprisoned. But in order to break down the iron circle of inhumanity, we must see how it was forged, and there it is ideas and culture themselves that play the major role.⁴⁶⁹

According to Said, ending the Palestinian-Israeli conflict necessitates:

really asking the question of Palestine, going to great lengths to seek answers, speaking, writing, acting together with others to make sure that the just and right answers are the ones settled upon. Avoidance, force, fear, and ignorance will no longer serve⁴⁷⁰

⁴⁶⁸ Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 11.

⁴⁶⁹ Said, *The Question of Palestine*, 70.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 235.

Taking his cue from Said's work, Khoury sought to disrupt Israeli hegemonic meta-narratives by proposing both the Palestinian and Jewish traumatic experiences as mirrors for one another. While writing about Palestine and disrupting Israel's monopoly over trauma is not political per se, it may and should open up the possibility of politics. In a foreword note to *Meta Journal's* 2018 trauma issue, Stephan Milich and Lamia Moghnieh assert that "the construction of a cultural or historical trauma can influence public opinion and politics."⁴⁷¹ As he dramatizes the Palestinian pain, Khoury constructs the historical (but also structural) trauma which in turn opens up the possibility of political change. It is up to us the witnesses to envision a way out.

One such possibility of political change emerged in January 2013 when a group of Palestinian protestors set up a symbolic tent village in the West Bank to counter Israeli settlement plans in the area. The protestors named their encampment "Bāb al-shams" in a clear allusion to Khoury's 1998 magnum opus which carries the same title. For its part, the Israeli army reacted by breaking up the encampment, to which the protestors responded by setting up a second campsite, "Ahfad Yūnis" ("the grandchildren of Yūnis)," in another act of reference to Khoury's novel. Both encampments gave the novel "a textual afterlife"⁴⁷² and signaled how a fictional narrative of the Palestinian *Nakbah* could surpass its literary borders to inspire an act of "political activism."⁴⁷³

⁴⁷¹ Milich and Moghnieh, "Trauma: Social Realities," 6.

⁴⁷² Paul, "The Grandchildren of Yūnis," 179.

⁴⁷³ Ibid., 177.

Moved by the impact of his own literature, Khoury wrote a virtual letter of support to the protestors saying:

This is the Palestine that Younis dreamt of in the novel . . . Younis had a dream made of words, and the words became wounds bleeding over the land. You became, people of Bab Al Shams, the words that carry the dream of freedom and return Palestine to Palestine.⁴⁷⁴

By tracing the development of Khoury's trauma writing on Palestine, this thesis project sought to show how literature can be a tool of recovering a once-marginalized traumatic history and how it can contest colonial archives that seek to efface the traumatic. This form of writing, as manifested by Khoury's project, does not fall into the trap of negating other equally traumatic narratives nor does it justify their effacement.

The result is a fictive space where the traumatized is able to reclaim their tragic experience but also transcend their solitude by discovering a shared identity and other similar traumatic experiences. In this way, Khoury's trauma narratives circumvent their historical specificity to implicate *other* colonial archives that have silenced traumatic experiences *elsewhere*. Perhaps this is most evident in his understanding of stories as *mirrors* that echo one another, a central theme that runs through most of his work.

⁴⁷⁴ Elias Khoury, translated by Sonja Mejcher-Atassi, "'Elias Khoury's Letter to the Real 'Gate of the Sun,'" *ArabLit*, January 13, 2013.

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